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# SPECIALIST EPONYMS AND GENERAL EPONYMS IN A LEXICOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

**Introduction**

The literature on general vs specialist vocabulary (Bidu-Vrânceanu 2007, Bidu-Vrânceanu 2008) approaches the migration of specialist vocabulary towards the word stock and brings forth descriptions of the methods contributing to this phenomenon. Our study, relying on lexicographic products, is so devised as to focus on eponyms, a category of words shared both by jargons and the general vocabulary within the framework of the English language.

**Aim(s) of the study**

This approach is intended to outline the richness of the English eponymic heritage in the lexicographic bibliographies. It also aims to reveal the abundance of lexicographic products which describe eponyms.

**Materials and method**

The term *eponym* was introduced in the English vocabulary in the mid-19th century (Collins Millennium 1999: 521). In spite of its long presence in the English wordstock, *eponym* was not included in the title of the first dictionary (Edwards 1968) compiled with the specific purpose of presenting the story of some words obviously originating in names of literary heroes. Nevertheless, very few years after this dictionary, Hendrickson (1972) authors the first lexicographic product to bear this label. With only two exceptions (Wolk 1980, Ehrlich 1999), all the other such works (dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks and pocket guides) within their titles lay an emphasis on the category of words they account for i.e., the eponyms.

The corpus tailored for the currently described research includes lexicographic paperback and online works

The materials representing the research background were selected on the basis of a well-defined purpose, namely to meet the two following requirements:

a) to exclusively describe common words derived from proper names, which were first used in specialist literatures;
b) to account only for those eponyms acknowledge to belong to the English vocabulary.

The methods applied in performing the research are the traditional ones and involve the corpus analysis on structural and comparative principles, on chronology and on content analysis.

**Research results.**

Since English eponyms emerge against a well-defined cultural background, they are born with a high degree of cultural specificity. The 50 lexicographic products (see the annex) introducing eponyms may be roughly divided into general dictionaries of eponyms (15 in number) and specialist dictionaries of eponyms (35).

The former category further subdivides into:

a) plain dictionaries of eponyms (Beeching 1989, Freeman and Newman 1997, Trahir 1992);
b) dictionaries of eponyms whose title emphasizes the publishing house brand (Douglas 1990, Douglas 1991, Letusé and Rogelio 2001, Manser 1996 and Manser 2004). In fact, they are merely general dictionaries which advertize for the brand of their publishing house.

The latter category further distinguishes works to cover:

a.very specific fields: economics (Segura and Braun 2004), social sciences (Trahir 2001) and plants (Quattrocchi 1999)



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b.medicine (32 lexicographic works). The possible taxonomy of these medical dictionaries below reveals the compilers' or the editors' focus on:
c.eponymists (Berrios and Freeman 1991, Berry 1992, Forrest and Carr 1982);
d.plain medical eponyms (Chadwick 2001, Firkin and Whitworth 1987);
e.eponyms presented together with other lexical categories (Delong 2002, Hunter 1994, Rodin and Jack 1987, Sloane 1997);
f.eponyms in specific medical branches (neurology – Koehler, Bruyn and Pearce 2000, orthopedics – Moll 1998, obstetrics and gynecology – Baskett 1996, behavioural optometry – Hendrickson 1993, psychology – Zusne 1987, radiology – Kanne, Rohrmann and Lichtenstein 2006);
g.a certain degree of subjectivity in the making of the eponym list, where authors take over their predecessors' legacy (Forbis 1998, Barankin 2005) or where authors put forward their own versions (Forrest and Carr 1982, Jablonski 1991, Marcucci 2001 and Stedman 1998).
Our previous research in the field of eponyms leads to the following observations:
irrespective of their belonging to the English word stock or to jargons, eponyms represent a lexical category with a few peculiar features:
1. they were created to fill in jargon or field-specific lexical gaps and this aspect implicitly accounts their cultural specificity. In other words, eponymists of fame in the Anglo-Saxon and North American worlds may mean or say next to nothing to members of other cultures less conversant with Anglo-American vocabularies. Hence, translation problems may occur in the exchange of ideas characterizing our globalized society.
2. eponyms in chemistry or botany, for example, have a simple structure since they derive from personal names, to which suffixes were added:
- ***ium*** (for chemical elements): *promethium, einsteinium, rutherfordium*;
- ***ite*** (for names of minerals): *alexandrite, lewisite*;
- ***ia*** (for names of plants): *magnolia, fuchsia, dahlia*;
- ***ize*** (for verbs describing processes): *pasteurize*

3. eponyms in 'ready-made' expressions (pertaining to classical sciences) consist of joint structures which put together common nouns and personal names:
- physics: *the Mach number, the Rutherford model, the Bohr radius, the fast Fourier transforml*;
- mathematics: *Boolean geometry, Euclidean algorithm, Pythagorean theorem, the Maclaurin's series, the Sheppard's corrections, the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality, the Hall–Littlewood polynomial*;
- anatomy: *Cowper's glands, Brocca's area*;
-chemistry: *the Russell-Saunders coupling, Hoffmann method, Daniell cell*;
- although numerous of the various fields of (scientific) activity (and research) operate with eponyms (such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, financing and banking, law, engineering, shipbuilding, metallurgy), they have not been described in specifically-devised lexicographic instruments, but they may be found in specialized dictionaries. The following example was extracted from such a source: *to mirandize* (to recite the Miranda warnings to a person under arrest, MDL 1996: 314)

**Conclusions**

The present study was devised and performed with a clear aim: to demonstrate the wide variety of dictionaries which account for and implicitly popularize eponyms, no matter the field they were created within.

Lexicographers do show a particular interest in approaching eponyms and, as a consequence, very many useful instruments have been compiled so far. Although there have been produced specialist for other fields of activity, the most numerous of the dictionaries dedicated to eponyms are circumscribed to the medical jargon.

**Annex**

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**ABSTRACT**
*Professional or amateur English and American lexicographers have taken steady interest in the study and popularization of eponyms, mainly created in specialist vocabularies which gradually integrate in the word stock. Since English eponyms have been the topic of 50 paperback and electronic dictionaries, they do enjoy a special status among the other directions in lexicographical approaches (foreignisms, abbreviations, etc.).*

*This paper originates in a larger project intended to cover a wide range of aspects regarding eponyms (suc as their creation and popularization, classification, usage, migration from one science to another, translation difficulties and last but not least, ethical problems). Purely lexicographic in its perspective, the current approach constitutes a state-of-the-art reflection of eponyms as they appear mainly in English and American lexicographies. The classification of dictionaries of eponyms envisaged in this presentation invites to investigating eponyms in fields yet uncovered and to compiling such works for theoretical and practical reasons.*



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