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Naming in the public sphere of Stavropol city: sacred and profane

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Abstract: The paper deals with onomastics in the public sphere of Stavropol, a multinational city in the south of Russia. The term *ergonym* is widely used in the Russian-speaking linguistic community. According to ICOS, ergonyms are names of products or brands and are "sometimes used for the name of an institution or commercial firm". Thus, we consider ergonyms as urban toponyms – names in public space, comprising business names of diverse commercial institutions (enterprises, firms/companies, stores, cafés, organizations, etc.). Ergonyms are important markers of certain sociocultural processes; they are a mirror of contemporary everyday culture.

We aim to explore the phenomena of using theonyms, cosmonyms and mythonyms as ergonyms, i.e. as names of public places. In everyday naming practice we observe the process of desacralization obtained by mixing the sacred and the profane. Furthermore, while describing the "ergonymic landscape" of the city, we point out the desecration/profanation of the sacred word *paradise*, widely used in public names.

Keywords: names in public space, ergonyms, theonyms, cosmonyms, mythonyms, desecration, substandard language in public names.

Ergonyms: theoretical background

The term *ergonym* is widely used in Russian onomastic terminology. According to ICOS, ergonyms are names of products or brands and are "sometimes used for the name of an institution or commercial firm". Thus, we consider ergonyms as urban toponyms, names in public space, comprising business names of diverse commercial institutions (enterprises, firms/companies, stores, cafés/restaurants, travel agencies, lawyer's offices, beauty parlors, pharmacies, etc.). In fact, we speak about ergonyms as they are described by N. Podolskaya, who defined ergonyms as a category of onyms, the proper names of business associations of people, including unions, organizations, institutions, corporations, enterprises, societies, establishments (Подольская 1988: 151).

Western European researchers rarely use the term *ergonym* and tend to use the collocations *company name*, *name in public space* or *commercial name*. Essentially, we are both talking about the same phenomena. Paula Sjöblom notes that "in international onomastics commercial names are sometimes called ergonyms" (Sjöblom 2014: 93). But the researcher stresses:

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> However, the concept of *ergonym* is somewhat broader than the concept of *commercial name*. Aside from names of commercial businesses and products names, ergonym also includes all basically non-commercial institutions, such as schools, cultural places, churches, different administrative fields and organisations. I consider both these terms necessary and useful, albeit ergonym is, in a way, a hyperonym and commercial name partly its hyponym (Sjöblom 2014: 93).

Moreover, in our opinion, there is one more important detail in P. Sjöblom's perspective on commercial names: the author's viewpoint claims that "there is usually a juridical owner of a commercial name who determines its rights and limitations of use". As for ergonyms, we can say that these onomastic units are not always bound by legal rules, and it often happens that the owners of small shops or hairdressers accidentally or intentionally call their businesses the same name, and both names can coexist in the business field of a city. Obviously, this is impossible when it comes to well-known established companies with recognizable names.

It is easy to understand the aspiration of the author of an ergonym to attract the addressee who is a potential consumer of goods and services. Considered as an element of culture, an ergonym embodies the attempt of dialogue between the nominator and the addressee (recipient). Using the name of a business object the nominator not only informs the consumer about the offered services or products but often appeals to his emotions. Thus, the functions of ergonyms are numerous: working for the consumer, they inform, advertise, identify, persuade. In addition to the aforementioned, they can decorate or even spoil the "face" of the city.

Ergonyms as a mirror of contemporary everyday culture

Modern cities are multilingual, they are never "silent": their "voices" have many constituents, from the numerous advertising banners that each and every minute carry on a conversation with the people in the city to the vast onomastic space of the city. Ergonyms are only a part of this space.

The choice of a name for a company can be considered a responsible stage in its activities. No business entity will exist nameless, anonymous. The Latin expression *nomen est omen* is reflected in the Russian saying "a ship will sail the way you name it". Likewise, a well-known English proverb says "a bad beginning makes a bad ending". Expressing the same idea in other words, we get "a good beginning makes a good ending". This is exactly what applies to ergonyms as names of businesses. At this important stage, some name-givers are satisfied with the first beautiful, unusual, eye-catching word (in their subjective opinion). But many of the business-owners show a more serious approach and take advice from professionals – advertising experts, psychologists, philologists, historians.

Research in this field is valuable because ergonyms are very mobile and subject to influences, they are important markers of certain sociocultural processes and they are

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one of the mirrors in which history and everyday life of the city are reflected. To study "fashion" in city ergonyms means to make the city's linguistic portrait, which allows seeing typical and individual aspects in onomastic space, to capture the image of the city in its everyday life. The process of naming reflects verbal and cognitive activities of name-givers, that is why observation and reflection on it are important for studying creativity in everyday language, tracing the processes of semanticization in our everyday life.

The process of nomination in a city's onomastic space has certain patterns and trends (both positive and negative) that draw the attention of advertising specialists, linguists, psychologists, and sociologists. Because of their multiplicity and transparency, openness to anybody's view, names of city objects are historically significant for the creation of a dimensional cultural portrait of a city.

Searching for eye-catching, unusual memorable names, nominators demonstrate their own aesthetic values, language preferences, sense of style, taste or, conversely, their absence. There are evident extremes in the naming practices of Stavropol city; in its onomastic landscape one can find both pathetic (or pseudo-pathetic) names and names rooted in the low language registers.

The sacred and the profane as binary opposition

The *sacred* (*Holy*) and *profane* are traditional concepts of philosophy and theology. *The sacred* and *the profane* are cross-disciplinary universals. These terms as such and especially the phenomena that underlie them are subjects of disputes in the field of humanities. Different aspects of this dichotomy were studied by many scholars including Ė. Durkheim, M. Eliade, M. Bakhtin, etc. The analysis of the different existing points of view is beyond the scope of the author, so we are only stating that the sacred and the profane "are closely interrelated phenomena and paired concepts" (Федоровских). Synonyms for *sacred* are *holy*, *divine*, *heavenly*, *eternal*, *high*. The *profane* is opposed to the sacred and its synonyms are *mundane*, *material*, *earthly*, *worldly*, *low*. The borders between the sacred and the profane are movable, so the transformation of the sacred into the profane is possible, and vice versa. Sacred becomes profane as a result of routinization. Ordinary life with its daily routine is the main area of concentration of profane meanings, the realm of commonplaceness. When entering it sacred objects, signs, symbols, meanings, and values lose their transcendental dimension (Мусин 2015: 122).

Sacred and profane in the ergonyms of Stavropol city

For this paper, we have collected a corpus of about 40 names of shops, cafés, beauty parlors, etc. in the city of Stavropol, Russia (450 thousand people). The corpus includes ergonyms relevant to the subject of our study.

'Paradise', 'Eden', 'Elysium'

The sacred is not localized exclusively within the borders of religion but is closely related to it and is a necessary feature of religious consciousness. Both sacred and

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profane are expressed through signs and symbols. A person's faith in God determines his or her linguistic identity, which is expressed verbally at different language levels. The linguistic sign is one of the ways to manifest the sacred and the profane. At the same time, the borders between sacred and profane are movable; therefore it is possible to observe the processes of sacralization and desacralization (profanization) of words that belong to the religious discourse. While analyzing the practice of naming, we see the result of profanization, particularly when it comes to names comprising the word *paradise*.

The concept of Paradise is one of the keystones of the religious system of values. Different religions have different ideas about it. Generally, without going into a detailed analysis of these differences, one can say that paradise is understood as the birthplace of humanity (the original Paradise, Eden). The Kingdom of Heaven is the ultimate goal in life, a reward for a righteous life on earth; it is a source, a place or state of bliss, delight. The concept of paradise is rooted in the mind of believers; it occupies one of the main places in the religious culture and is sacred a priori.

The words *paradise* and *Eden* originally belong to the religious vocabulary. They represent a worldview according to which people originally lived in Heaven, in the Garden of Eden, but were expelled from it. Entering Heaven is possible only after a righteous life on earth. But dictionaries, both of Russian and other languages, also determine the figurative meaning of this word. Desecration of the word *paradise* lies in the fact that many places or life situations are compared to paradise as a place of supreme pleasure and bliss. For instance, in everyday Russian language, collocations like *heavenly place, heavenly corner, heavenly dwelling*, etc. are widely used.

In an effort to attract prospective customers/consumers, owners of various establishments (most often shops, cafés, beauty salons, and so on) pay attention to the lexeme *paradise*, actualizing its figurative meaning. All these names have a definite semantic relationship with the idea of bliss, "the heaven of heavens". It is assumed that after the purchase of goods or services –whatever these may be, from beer to haircuts – the consumer will get a truly heavenly delight. This maneuver is supposed to affect the consumer's purchase decision and it is absolutely in the spirit of the era of consumption, in which the consumer is forced to believe that any product – food, clothes, drinks, furniture, etc. – is a source of pleasure, joy, and satisfaction. The ideology of consumerism sacralizes it as the only way to achieve happiness.

We have come across twelve names with the lexeme *paradise* as follows:

Хлопковый рай 'Cotton Paradise'
Сладкий рай 'Sweet Paradise'
Фруктовый рай 'Fruit Paradise'
Мясной рай 'Meat Paradise'
Шашлычный рай 'Barbecue Paradise'
Мебельный рай 'Furniture Paradise'
Кухонный рай 'Kitchen Paradise'
Суши рай 'Sushi Paradise'
Подарочный рай 'Gifts Paradise'
Цветочный рай 'Flower Paradise'
Пивной рай 'Beer Paradise'
Свадебный рай 'Wedding Paradise'

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The two ergonyms below also promise heavenly pleasures, but the source of the pleasure is not declared:

Собственный рай 'One's Own Paradise'
Затерянный рай 'The Lost Paradise'

In the first case, it turns out that the name belongs to a limited liability company with activities in the field of entertainment. The second example is interesting because, at first blush, it contains an allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but it actually does not. The matter is that the figurative meaning of the Russian adjective *lost* is "inconspicuous due to remoteness, inaccessibility". Indeed, this name "hides" a sauna located on the outskirts of the city.

Among the city ergonyms one can also note

Эдем 'Eden' (fur coats boutique) and
'Elysium' (caskets)

Eden is the biblical 'garden of God', with its abundance of all things; this word from Hebrew *ʿēden* means *delight*. Elysium is the final resting place of the souls of the virtuous, the part of the Underworld in Greek mythology. It is noteworthy that the meanings of these two words are not known to every potential consumer. A small survey has been undertaken, consisting of fifty persons who were asked about "what is Eden" and "what is Elysium". The answers have shown that forty two out of fifty respondents did not know anything about Elysium. In the case of Eden, the situation turned to be better: the word was familiar to thirty respondents. It may be that this little poll is of little sociological value, but nevertheless it demonstrates the fact that sometimes name-givers and their potential recipients "speak different languages": name-givers do not take into account recipients' lack of background knowledge, and it leads to communicative failure.

Ergonyms containing the word *paradise* affect the consumer through the associative background that they create. Units of religious vocabulary as components of names carry various connotations. Such ergonyms are metaphorical, and their purpose is to serve as the linguistic expression of a pragmatic impact. Names like these are first of all targeted at hedonistic, sensual needs of a consumer.

In the aforementioned examples the word *paradise* is actually profaned twice. At first, it was profaned when it entered the language of everyday life and acquired figurative meanings. The second profanation seems to have occurred as the word has been used even more "cynically" when it appears on a sign with the shop's name, in relation to purely mundane things, pleasures of the "body and stomach". It is implied that a person reaches the state of bliss upon merely purchasing of jeans, eating roasted meat or visiting the spa (this paper, as it was mentioned above, did not aim to focus on the differences in understanding paradise, for instance, between the Bible and the Quran;

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researchers find the perception of paradise in Islam more carnal than in Christianity, where paradise and high spirituality are synonymous).

The *paradise* component in the structure of ergonymic names promises the consumer all the best, something wonderful, incredible. Of course, these promises are not perceived by consumers literally, but the result of name-givers' "onomastic creativity" is the utmost profanity of the religious words, initially denoting the greatest spiritual values of the believers. In fact, the word *paradise* in commercial names has turned into a cliché, it has become banal.

'Nirvana'

In Stavropol's onomastic space two ergonyms have been found containing the word *nirvana:*

Аудио-Нирвана 'Audio-Nirvana' (audio-equipment) and
'Nirvana Hookah Bar' (a place for vaporizing and smoking flavored tobacco)

Nirvana is the fundamental concept of Buddhism. It means freedom in the form of total enlightenment, a state of absolute bliss and omniscience resulting in freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*Long 2014: 29).* Name-givers' logic in these cases is clear: in the name they actualize the figurative meaning of the word *nirvana* – an ideal condition of rest, harmony, joy. Names of this kind also stimulate positive associations and evoke unconscious positive emotions.

'Angel', 'The Eighth Heaven', 'Ark of the Covenant'

Among this small group of names, there are two ergonyms with predictable associations. The lexeme *ангел* 'angel' has been used for the names of a clothing boutique and a beauty parlor, belonging to a sole owner.

Actually, as in the case of the word *paradise*, the word *angel* is profaned and fixed in everyday language in expressions like "angelic face", "angelic smile", "angelic behavior", etc. Of course, nobody saw an angel, but everybody's first associations with the word are related to the concepts of 'beauty' and 'light'. The word refers to the idea of beauty and this consideration has become the main drive of the name-giver's motivation. The name-giver's associations while choosing the name were the following: an angel – unearthly supernatural being – angelic face – unearthly beauty. This ergonym is essentially not informative but, expressing the idea of beauty, it makes a psychological impact on women in promising that after buying clothes and visiting the salon they will be as beautiful as angels.

Восьмое небо 'The Eighth Heaven' (ergonym for a sauna)

The link with the idea of heavenly pleasure is quite visible in the name. This is a "nod in the direction" of the *seven heavens*. It is well known that in religious cosmogony

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the seven heavens refer to the seven divisions of Heaven but, having been routinized, the expression metaphorically means "to experience great joy", "to be at the best place ever". However, the name-givers took a step further and added one more division, one more "level" of perfection, trying to attract their visitors.

The third name in this group – a bookstore name – is of some interest because a quite rare lexical unit occurs in it:

Ковчег 'Ark of the Covenant'

The survey of thirty visitors of the store has shown that this word was familiar to them in relation to Noah, i.e. they thought that the name of the store came from the story of Noah's Ark. However, the store owner meant by the Ark the holiest shrine of the Jewish people – a gold-covered wooden chest containing the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Of course, the bookseller had good intentions while naming his store and his track of thought is easy to understand: from the very moment of their invention books were a real treasure and the best gift. Nonetheless, one may ask once again: has anybody got formal right to give a sacred name to a place where one can find recipe books and romance novels, rather than Lives of the Saints?

'Barakah', 'Namaste'

This block of names includes two ergonyms of Eastern origin:

*Барака*т 'Barakah' and
Намасте 'Namaste'

Barakah (or *baraka*) is a synonym for *goodness*. According to Islam, every Muslim wants his/her life to be filled with barakah. Barakah can be found both in people chosen by God and within places or physical objects. As a consequence, it is a name for boys meaning 'abundance', 'blessings'. It looks like the name-giver is looking at his café (the nomination object) as at his "child", his creation, that is why he is feeling free to grant the name. Thus, in the given example *Barakah* can be considered an ergonym derived from an anthroponym.

Namaste yoga-studio got its name from the Indian respectful form of greeting. The greeting literally means 'I bow to you', implying 'I bow to the divine in you', because it is believed that there is a divine spark within any person. It is not surprising to see the word on a business sign: as indicated in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "religious and secular culture come together in the increasing use of *namaste*: the term is associated with both Hinduism and yoga" (Merriam-Webster.com).

Astronyms/cosmonyms, theonyms, mythonyms

The next group of names is typical of every Russian city. These are ergonyms that represent transonymized cosmonyms and theonyms. It is a widely used mechanism

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among name-givers to choose a name from a great variety of words pleasing to the ear, denoting astronomical objects, gods or mythical heroes. The choice of names like these is usually dictated by the name-givers' desire to find the most euphonic sound combination – they are rarely anxious about the search of meanings. Thus, in such names the relationship with the object is arbitrary. Moreover, name-givers often do not have any background knowledge in astronomy or the history of the name chosen. For them, the name is merely a beautiful combination of sounds. The above-said does not apply to names like *Ника* 'Nike' (the owner aims to be victorious, to become a winner), *Меркурий* 'Mercury' (the owner knows about this Roman God as a patron of commerce), *Нарцисс* 'Narcissus' (associated with pleasant physical appearance, the name is sometimes used in the beauty industry). It is interesting to note that 'Mercury' as an ergonym is, as a rule, a transonymized mythonym and very seldom an astronym. On the contrary, we have included 'Jupiter' in the list of astronyms but not in that of mythonyms.

This group of names looks as follows:

– astronyms/cosmonyms

Водолей 'Aquarius'
Юпитер 'Jupiter'
Орион 'Orion'

– theonyms, mythonyms

Афина 'Athen'
Афродита 'Aphrodite'
Ника 'Nike'
Меркурий 'Mercury'
Персей 'Perseus'
Арго 'the Argo'
Валькирия 'Valkyrie'
Нарцисс 'Narcissus'
Феникс 'Phoenix'
Олимп 'Olympus'

All the names listed above are of Greek or Roman origin. They belong to the higher (bookish) layer of words, convey pathos, sound poetically and that is why they are attractive to name-givers, who often appeal to recipients' emotions. Name-givers are often unconscious of the deep sacred meanings of these words due to the lack of background knowledge.

Sometimes the choice of the names based on mythonyms may be explained by the latter's ability to be recognized, by a large number of associations related to these names and, consequently, by the possibility to transfer characteristic features of mythological heroes on the commercial object named after them or the atmosphere inside this place.

Vernacular language as a source for ergonyms

A relatively new phenomenon in the practice of naming in Stavropol city is the appearance of ergonyms that represent vernacular language – slang, substandard

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words. The vernacular form is a heterogeneous language area, with no clear borders, characterized by the complex interaction of colloquial speech of urban dwellers, local dialects and, sometimes, professional language. The vernacular language is the language of everyday communication of most people, irrespective of their age, gender or occupation. A lot of people speak everyday language that is far from literary standards; moreover, their speech contains obscene words. Thus, the emergence of the aforementioned ergonyms demonstrates the so-called "barbarization" of the standard language (Russian, in this case). It means the penetration of jargon, dialect lexical units, slang into the literary Russian language.

For instance, there is a café in Stavropol named *«Ёксель-моксель»* [yoksel'-moksel']. This ergonym is a rhymed word combination with the help of which it is possible to express disappointment, discontent, astonishment. But, in fact, it is a euphemism that replaces more expressive obscene lexical units, the so-called "unprintable words" that cannot be written on a café's sign. Obscene words violate social taboos, they are a feature of "lower" culture, but being rooted in the oldest layers of the lexicon, they keep their attractiveness for some people and therefore name-givers use them in order to "add spice" to the ergonym. It is needless to say that the ultimate target of the business owner is to attract more visitors.

The vernacular, obscene vocabulary and jargon can be instruments of language games, creating ambiguously sounding words with double meaning as in the following example. There is a name of a bar that graphically looks like 'Bar Duck'. At first sight this name is quite "innocent" but the phrase "Let's go to the 'Bar Duck'", pronounced in Russian ("Пойдём в *'Bar Duck'* [*pojdyom v bardak*]"), contains a jargon word, which was earlier outside literary standard. The English 'Bar Duck' sounds similar to the word *бардак* [bardak], which has the obsolete meaning 'brothel' (it is nowadays used in colloquial speech with the meaning 'disorder, mess'). Consequently, this ergonym generates false associations that are contrary to the nature of the activities of the enterprise in question. Of course, name-givers should be careful with names of this kind in order not to cross a fine line between funny puns and vulgarity.

Conclusion

While examining the onomastic space of a modern Russian city (Stavropol), many ergonyms have been found derived from lexical units that initially were sacred words, having great sacred power. Gradually these words have undergone profanization, acquired figurative meanings and become widely used in everyday language. The expression "double profanization" was used in respect to the transition of the sacred words into the group of commercial names. Placing the word *paradise* on the sign of a pub or a grocery store and combinations like *meat paradise* or *beer paradise* should cause rejection at least on the part of believers. But the fact is that the daily routine has profanized sacred words to such an extent that their deep meaning, their high spirituality have been lost and are not acknowledged by the speakers. Words like these in contexts like these sound blasphemous and sacrilegious.

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In addition, a new trend in the naming process has been noted, namely the emergence of ergonyms consisting of words from vernacular, substandard language, or ambiguous language puns. It is evident that consumers may be attracted by names like these because they are provocative and, to some extent, shocking. Name-givers try to distinguish themselves from competitors, balancing on a fine line between decency and vulgarity. The influx of such names is likely to continue, reflecting inevitable socio-cultural processes.

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