

COMPANY NAMES AS EUPHEMISMS: FUNERAL HOME NAMES IN POST-ATHEISTIC SOCIETIES (RUSSIAN AND BULGARIAN EXAMPLES)

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Abstract: In the delicate sphere of funeral business a clear advertising name may be ethically unacceptable, thus leading name givers to use a euphemism. Hypothetically, the base of such a euphemism could be a religious concept, but in the present case, we deal with two societies that for decades were officially atheistic. Sometimes, the aesthetic proclivities of a name giver come into conflict with the religious point of view, e.g., with names like *Avesta*, *Hades*, *Isis*, *Karma* and *Veles* (after a Slavic mythological figure). In a country with a predominantly Christian (Orthodox, more precisely) culture, such names are in the wide sense unconventional.

Keywords: company name, ergonymy, funeral home, religion.

Opening remarks

Names of firms and companies providing funeral services are an interesting subject for study, as the attitude towards death is an important characteristic of the society. At the same time, compared to other ergonymic subcategories, they are not often the subject of study although there are some papers devoted to this topic¹.

The starting point for our study was the following consideration. In the last two and a half decades the Russian language has been experiencing a “nominative explosion” in ergonymy: the number of names of commercial enterprises has snowballed (see Romanova 2009). This is due to two reasons that we will characterise briefly. Firstly, after the change of the economic system there was a growth in the number of enterprises, and secondly (and mainly), there were changes in the language, and the idea that a commercial enterprise, particularly one specialised in services, should have its own name settled in the mass linguistic consciousness of the past decades. Thus, the role of ergonymy, that is, the whole of company names in contemporary onomasticon, increases significantly.

¹ For example the papers by Polish linguists Parzniewska (1998) and Badyła (2007). The “funeral topic” is partly discussed by Wilkerson and Takashi Wilkerson (2013).

With regard to the scope of activity that we consider, the idea of the nominative explosion is more than topical. During the Soviet era in Russia, the burial services were provided by special municipal enterprises; usually, there was one enterprise for a large municipality. Now, this scope of activity is a competitive field and the organisation of burials and “related services”, such as the installation and maintenance of gravestones, are provided both by municipal agencies and by many private companies.

Of course, company names play an important role in the competitive environment. It should be noted that the creation of a company name in the field of funeral services is not a trivial task. On the one hand, a company name as the name intended for advertising² should be flashy, catchy, and attractive. On the other hand, what is appropriate in the name of a fashion shop can be ethically unacceptable in the field affecting the deep feelings of sorrow. The name, albeit advertising by nature, should nevertheless sound delicate. At the same time, we shall note that the tradition of speech etiquette in the subject field of the death and burial is largely determined by the religious tradition of the society, which was artificially broken in twentieth-century Russia, so the idea of what is acceptable and sensitive to the name of the funeral enterprise is now re-formed. In our research, it is important that ergonymy allows us to assess mass processes, make interesting observations on the processes taking place in the public consciousness and study public perceptions, particularly in relation to the religious sphere³.

For this study we have collected a corpus of 113 names of firms and companies of the Sverdlovsk region in Russia (about 3.5 million people, with the administrative centre in the city of Yekaterinburg), from the relevant section of the website *Yellow Pages*⁴, which includes names of companies involved in the organisation of funerals and companies related to the manufacture of gravestones and wreaths.

The field of business considered is rather specialised: of 113 companies, only 13 have funeral services as one of several areas of their activity. Accordingly, the names of these companies do not reflect their relation to the burial field, e.g., *Цветы от Марии* (‘Flowers from Mary’⁵, the flower business in general, including funeral bouquets), *Сталь-технологии* (‘Steel technology’), *Монастырская мастерская* (‘Monastic workshop’) (names of universal workshops manufacturing gravestones on top of everything else).

However, the name of the majority of firms somehow reflects the scope of the

² Russian onomastics defines the category of *advertising names*, which includes a sub-category, *ergonyms* (Krukova 2004).

³ Researchers in the field of cultural studies speak about post-Soviet desecularisation (see Kormina et al. 2015).

⁴ The website of the collection <http://www.yp.ru/yekaterinburg/search/text/ритуальные+услуги>

⁵ In most cases, we consider our material in the semantic aspect; therefore, introducing a Russian example, we confine ourselves only to its translation. Transliteration is provided only in the cases in which the graphic or phonetic aspect also proves to be important for our interpretation.

activity; that is, almost 90% of the names try to embody the idea of burial in certain ways.

Among this array we distinguish two groups: *descriptive names*, which describe the activity of the enterprise, and “*fully fledged*” *proper names*, which embody the same idea not through direct description, but indirectly, through associations and connotations. A little later we will return to some theoretical issues of this opposition, but above all, we will consider names of the descriptive type.

Names of the descriptive type

Officially, these names (27 in our corpus) are registered as company names, but in terms of everyday linguistic consciousness they are nominative sentences, e.g.: *Мастерская по изготовлению памятников* ‘Workshop manufacturing gravestones’. However, directly descriptive names designating possible workshops manufacturing funeral accessories are not typical of the names of actual funeral agencies, since by virtue of the existing Russian speech etiquette a straight talk about death may require euphemisms. As mentioned above, during the Soviet era, municipalities were in charge of funerals and to refer to this type of activity they used a euphemistic expression, e.g. *специальные услуги* ‘specialised services’ or, in abbreviated form, *спецслужбы*, without any reference to the implied specifics. Such municipal enterprises and their names still exist, e.g.

Комбинат специализированного обслуживания ‘Combine of specialised servicing’
Комбинат специализированных услуг ‘Combine of specialised services’
Служба спецобслуживания ‘Service of specialised servicing’

The last name above is interesting because the euphemism leads to tautology.

The adjectival lexeme *ритуальный* ‘ritual’ is very popular as a euphemism for *погребальный* ‘funeral’. In our corpus this lexical item is used by 12 firms, in names like

Агентство ритуальных услуг ‘The agency of ritual (funeral⁶) services’
Салон ритуальных услуг ‘Salon of ritual services’
Городская ритуальная компания ‘City ritual company’

We can say that in the Russian language of the second half of the 20th century the lexical unit ‘ritual’ developed the meaning ‘funeral’, although dictionaries do not provide this meaning⁷. Although in dictionaries this meaning is not indicated, it is well established in use. It is enough to say that the section of the reference website *Yellow Pages* is called *ритуальные услуги* ‘ritual services’. In this regard, the following example is interesting: *Мусульманская ритуальная служба* ‘Muslim ritual service’. In Soviet

⁶ Henceforth, in the literal translation of Russian examples, we keep the lexical item ‘ritual’, but in all cases except for particularly specified ones, it means ‘funeral’.

⁷ See, e.g., the Academic edition of the Dictionary of the Russian language (vol. 3: 720).

times, an indication of religious affiliation was impossible, so it is a sign of the recent time, but the lexical unit ‘ritual’ with the meaning of ‘funeral’ comes from the language of the Soviet era.

A clear sign of the modern language is the direct use of the lexical unit *похоронный* ‘funeral’, e.g.:

Православная похоронная служба ‘Orthodox funeral service’
Похоронное агентство ‘Funeral agency’
Похоронная компания ‘Funeral company’
Похоронный дом ‘Funeral home’

In our opinion, the last example is a linguistic calque from the English language, which appeared originally in the translation of fiction.

In addition to these examples, the lexical unit *похоронный* ‘funeral’ and phrases comprising it are also used in the second group of the material as a clarifying definition or a so-called generic component. Apart from these examples – *похоронное агентство/ компания/ дом / служба* ‘a funeral agency/ company/ home/ office’ –, the expression *похоронное бюро* ‘funeral bureau’ is used as a generic component. In the 20th century, such expressions could be estimated as “humour close to dark humour” as the word of the thematic group “mournful event” is combined with a word of the official, bureaucratic language. It has apparently become common in the field of use.

As a conclusion for the group of descriptive names, we note a tendency towards the “de-euphemisation” of the funeral area of economic activity. We can trace a sort of “legalisation” of the idea of burial in mass consciousness.

About the difference between descriptive and “fully fledged” proper names

Before moving on to the analysis of the second part of our corpus, we would like to emphasize the idea that the consideration of a name as a proper names or a description does not depend on the lexical content. Let us consider two hypothetical examples:

* *Ритуальный салон* ‘Ritual salon’
 * *Салон «Ритуальный»* ‘Salon “Ritual”’

In the first case, we have a description – the phrase that corresponds to the grammatical rules of the standard Russian language. In the second case, there is a proper name followed by a generic component, although the lexical units are the same in both cases. Outwardly, the difference is expressed formally in the use of capital letters (which in Russian is used only for proper names), writing between quotation marks and changing of word order. In speech the difference will be less noticeable, especially if we exclude the inversion, but it will still manifest in intonation and the use of pauses

of voice. In addition to the hypothetical examples, we give a real example, maintaining the graphic form:

*РИТУАЛЬНЫЙ, салон ритуальных услуг*⁸ ‘RITUAL, Salon of ritual services’

In this example the same lexical unit is used as a proper name and a generic component. However, such cases are relatively rare, and in our material they relate only to the lexical unit *ритуал* ‘ritual’ and its adjectival derivative. In most cases, the creator of the name chooses the lexical unit that allows attributing the name to the class of proper names due to the fact that it transmits information about the type of object by indirect ways (in metaphorical, metonymical, associative or symbolic ways).

“Fully fledged” proper names

There are 73 names in this part of the corpus. We consider them within several subgroups, located on the same scale. In one of the extreme positions of the scale there are names which are close to descriptive names through their informational content; on the other end there are names that do not carry any specific information about the type of the object, that is, they do not allow to confidently determine that it is related to the ritual scope of activity.

Subgroup 1. The most informative names

These are 9 names of firms that manufacture tombstones. Basically, these are stone-cutting firms, whose names reflect this kind of activity, e.g.:

Студия камня ‘Stone studio’
Мрамор-сервис ‘Marble service’
Габбро ‘Gabbro’

There are interesting names of two competing firms, distinguished by means of the inversion of the components: *камень* [kamen] ‘stone’ and *проф.* [prof] ‘prof’, abbreviated from ‘professional’.

Камень-проф [Kamen-prof] ‘Stone-prof’
ПрофКамень [ProfKamen] ‘ProfStone’

At the same time, we note that the combinations with analytical adjectives⁹

⁸ We shall note that, in most cases, we adhere to the standard form of examples – the proper name is spelled with a capital letter, then a generic component separated by a comma, with a lowercase. Exceptions are allowed only in the cases in which the graphic form is semantically loaded.

⁹ “In the Russian language of the 20th century a particular grammatical class of words is formed – these are analytical determinants, indeclinable adjectives” (Панов 1999: 152), for

similar to the example *Мрамор-сервис* ‘marble-service’ are not typical for the Russian language, but they are widely used in commercial names. However, word-formation in commercial names in general is different from “normative” word-formation (see Romanova 2007).

In general, we must say that these names reflect the specificity of the company, but they do not “read” the idea of burial, except, perhaps, one name: *Стелагравер* [Stelagraver] ‘Stele engraver’. This neologism composed of the root *стела* (*stela* ‘tombstone’, with one of the meanings), and *гравер* (‘engraver’).

In its pure and doubtless form, the idea of burial is expressed in the next subgroup of names.

Subgroup 2. Names which embody the idea of burial

These are 11 names that are built on playing upon the lexical unit *ритуал* ‘ritual’. The name itself is usually followed by a clarifying description, e.g.:

Ритуал, салон-магазин ‘Ritual, salon-store’
Ритуал-содействие ‘Ritual-assistance’
Ритуал-сервис ‘Ritual-service’
Юстус-ритуал ‘Justus-ritual’

From the formal point of view, it is interesting to note the analytical combinations in the last three examples. We interpret the last name as a reference to the Latin word *justus* meaning ‘righteous’. However, this interpretation requires competence, exceeding the average level of a Russian native speaker.

We found the name *Сервис-ритуал* ‘service ritual’ to go with the example *Ритуал-сервис* ‘ritual-service’ (we have already presented a similar inversion microsystem above). However, the name of the ‘service ritual’, strictly speaking, is not included in our corpus; it is related to the company that is geographically located in a different region.

According to the lexical and semantic criteria, we include in this subgroup two names with a synonymous substitution:

Обряд, похоронный дом ‘Ceremony, funeral home’
Обряд, ритуальное агентство ‘Ceremony, ritual agency’

Such a substitution is rare. First, the word *обряд* ‘ceremony’ does not get any unambiguous semantic link with the idea of burial, unlike the word *ритуал* ‘ritual’. Thus, in the second example the lexical unit *ритуальный* ‘ritual’ specifies which *обряд* ‘ceremony’ is implied. Second, we assume that an ordinary native speaker relates the borrowed lexical unit *ритуал* ‘ritual’ by intuition to stylistically higher layers of the bookish way of speaking, which is more suitable for burial situations.

which, in our view, the current, modern ergonymy can provide a large amount of evidence material.

Subgroup 3. Names with predictable associations

The third subgroup includes names with “predictable” associations related to the idea of burial. Basically, these are names associated with the concept of “memory”. Twelve names directly express this idea, using three lexical units. The lexical unit *память* ‘memory’ occurs in two names, identical in appearance, but related to businesses with different areas of activity:

Память, торговая фирма ‘Memory, trading company’

Память, салон похоронных услуг ‘Memory, funeral services salon’

The lexical unit is also included in a name: *Сад памяти* ‘Memory garden’. This is the name of an agency in charge of activity that is exotic for the modern Russian lifestyle – burial of pets. We left this name in our corpus as it is included in the relevant section of the *Yellow Pages* website and, in general, it “fits” into the overall context of the “burial” situation. However, we moved one name that includes the lexical unit ‘memory’ to the next group of names, but we will speak about it later.

Other names are constructed on the basis of the lexical unit *мемориал* ‘memorial’ (etymologically, it comes from Latin *memoria* ‘memory’) and its adjectival derivative *мемориальный*, e.g.:

Мемориал, ритуальное агентство ‘Memorial, funeral agency’

Мемориал, камнеобрабатывающая фирма ‘Memorial, stone processing company’

Городской мемориальный центр ‘City memorial centre’

Военно-мемориальная компания ‘Military memorial company’

The third example refers to the municipal enterprise and the last one is the name of a private company that tries to mimic a traditional name of the Soviet era (the word *военный* ‘military’ hints at special relationship with the budget of the Ministry of Defence).

The great popularity of the lexical unit *мемориал* ‘memorial’ compared with the lexical unit *память* ‘memory’ is explained by the same factors as in the case of *ритуал* – *обряд* ‘ritual – ceremony’.

Three names with synonymous replacements of the lexical unit *мемориал* ‘memorial’ are also related to “predictable” associations, e.g.: *Обелиск МУП* ‘Obelisk MUP’ (the abbreviation is a standard designation for *municipal unitary enterprise*).

In addition, we classify as “predictable” the names referring to the ideas of time and eternity; these are three names, united by a single lexical unit, for example: *Вечность, компания* ‘Eternity, company’. One of the names expresses the idea of time by borrowing a name from ancient culture: *Хронос¹⁰, похоронный дом* ‘Kronos, funeral home’.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the names with “antique” associations, mostly comprising names of mythological characters, fall into the following subgroup. *Kronos* is referred to the group of names that express the idea of time, as the appellative meaning of this ancient Greek lexical unit

Thus, we have examined descriptive naming units and three subgroups of proper names, the appearance of which is “objective” to a certain extent because they are due to the system of language. They are opposed to the following two subgroups, in which we have included “unexpected” names, i.e. they are not due to the system of language, but to a greater degree to name givers’ free will. The associative link of such names with the scope of activity of the companies can be unexpected or even uninterpretable within linguistic background knowledge. In addition, these are names that can be associated with the idea of burial, but which, in our view, partly break down the ethos expected in such a sensitive area.

Subgroup 4. Names with free associations

These are names associated with the activities of organisations of different kinds in indirect ways: by belonging to the lexical-thematic group or by means of association, steady syntactic relations and so forth. This is about a quarter (25 items) of all the names that form the system of additional concepts associated with the idea of funeral in the public mind. We distinguish the following blocks:

4.1. Christian associations (in the broad sense)

Алтарь, мастерская по изготовлению памятников ‘Altar, a workshop for the manufacture of gravestones’

Ангел, похоронное бюро ‘Angel, funeral bureau’

Ангел-Элит, компания по продаже гробов ‘Angel-Elite, coffins sales company’. This name is semantically and grammatically impossible in standard Russian.

Рай ‘Paradise’

Эдем, ритуальное агентство ‘Eden, ritual agency’

The last two names, as well as some of the other examples mentioned above, form the pair *traditional word* – *Western European borrowing*. Another lexical unit occurs in four names:

Реквием ‘Requiem’ (2 company names)

Реквием, ритуальное агентство ‘Requiem, funeral agency’

Реквием-Урал ‘Requiem-Ural’

In the latter case, the lexical unit *реквием* ‘requiem’ is included in the analytical combination with the name of the region.

Finally, in this block we include the name comprising a lexical unit discussed earlier: *Вечная память, ритуальное агентство* ‘Eternal memory, funeral agency’. The name is a set expression of the Orthodox funeral service, although in the Russian

is clear for an educated Russian native speaker through a series of loans. Thus, the Dictionary of the Russian language provides 24 words with an initial component *chron-* including a colloquialism (vol. 4: 627–628).

language of the 20th century, this expression is widely used outside the religious affiliation, in the grand style of speech.

4.2. *Antique names (in the broadest sense)*

Such names are based on borrowed lexical units associated with ancient culture:

Некрополь, ритуальное агентство 'Necropolis, funeral agency'
Пантеон 'Pantheon'

At the same time, these names could be associated with ancient mythology:

Харон, агентство ритуальных услуг 'Charon, funeral services agency'
Стикс 'Styx'
АиД, мастерская памятников 'Hades, gravestones workshop'

The last name requires a separate comment. Externally, thanks to the initial two letters, the name appears as a possible abbreviation, for example, the abbreviation of the owners' names. But in general, the word brings to mind the ancient pre-Christian mythology.

Карит-сервис, ритуальный салон 'Carit-service, funeral salon.' We interpret the first part of the analytical phrase as a borrowing of the phonetic form of Latin *caritas*, but the meaning rather seems to be related to the English word *charity*.

As already mentioned, this block includes names which are not directly connected with antiquity, e.g.: *Астрал, ритуальное агентство* 'Astral, ritual agency'. The lexical unit refers to the meaning of all sorts of new-age religious concepts, but in this form it refers to the borrowing from the classical language.

Finally, we consider the two most surprising names of the "antique" block:

Изида-сервис 'Isis-service' (see Fig. 1)
Авеста, салон ритуальных услуг 'Avesta, ritual services salon'

These names might have appeared as a result of the nominator's linguistic incompetence. They are associated with very specific funeral cultures – Egyptian¹¹, involving a special embalming technique, and Zoroastrian, originally involving that the body of the deceased as desecrated matter is not interred or burnt, but laid out to be devoured by wild birds, which is ethically and legally impossible in modern European culture.

In general, we believe that in "ancient" names the idea of ancient culture and sublime, classical, non-domestic matter predominates over the lexical meaning of a particular word, and that leads to such paradoxical names, at first glance.

¹¹ For Antique and Ancient Egyptian topics in names of funeral agencies in Polish onomastics, see Badyła (2007: 31).



Fig. 1 New sign of the 'Isis-service' company. The old one had white letters against a black background. In the new sign the word 'service' was removed and new pictures inspired by Ancient Egyptian art were added.

4.3. Other names, miscellanea

This block includes names that do not fall into the first two blocks, but imply a certain semantic relationship with the idea of funeral.

Помощь, ритуальное агентство 'Help, ritual agency'
Хэлп, похоронный дом 'Help, funeral home'

This is another pair of synonymous names, consisting of Russian items and a borrowed word. Unlike other cases, *Хэлп* 'Help' is a quasi-lexical unit, i.e., this complex of phonemes is not used in Russian and knowledge of English is required for its interpretation. We shall note that, in contrast to the names of other categories in the commercial name sphere, borrowings from English are extremely rare. Apparently, they do not fit with the idea of delicacy and tact.

БРИУС, бюро ритуальных услуг 'BRIUS, bureau of ritual services'. The name is an abbreviation of the Russian phrase denoting a generic component: *B* – [buro] 'bureau', *RI* – [ritualnykh] 'ritual', *US* – [uslug] 'services'. The abbreviations are extremely atypical for the considered material, perhaps because abbreviations in Russian are used in the official style, which is emotionally distant from the idea of tact and delicacy.

Черный тюльпан, салон 'Black tulip, salon'. The name goes back to the army jargon of the 80s – the name of the aircraft carrying the bodies of dead servicemen. However, the expression is gradually moving from the category of jargon to standard language, particularly in Yekaterinburg, where there is a monument bearing the same name.

Лик, ритуальное агентство 'Face, ritual agency'. The word means 'face', but in the high, solemn style which, in particular, is acceptable in the situation of burial (funeral oration).

Finally, the most dubious name from the point of view of the idea of burial is *Ноктюрн, салон-магазин* 'Nocturne, salon-store'. For a competent native speaker there might be a reference to the idea of night, which is traditionally linked with the idea of death in European culture, or as in the case of "ancient" names, the general idea of high culture predominates, which is far from everyday life situations. This name, in which the link with the idea of burial is practically invisible, is a transition to the next subgroup of the material.

Subgroup 5. Names which do not assume semantic interpretation

This subgroup is made up of names whose relationship with the object cannot be rationally explained. On the contrary, any attempt to relate the commercial name to the activity of the company results in misunderstanding:

Атрибут, городская похоронная компания 'Attribute, city funeral company'
Алмаз плюс, торговая компания 'Diamond plus, trading company'

For these companies the funeral activity is, as far as we can see, the core business, but the motives of the emergence of the names remain vague. The only thing we can assume is that the names starting with the letter "A" occupy earlier positions in the catalogue.

Арианд, интернет-магазин 'Aryand, online shop'
Арма, ритуальная мастерская 'Arma, funeral workshop'

These lexical units starting with the letter "A" have no meaning in Russian. The former may be an adapted foreign anthroponym, while the latter may have some explanation in the light of a Russian word – a building term, *арматура* [armatura] 'reinforcement' (the company is engaged in manufacturing gravestones).

Граф [graf] 'Count'(?). Seemingly, the word corresponds to the Russian lexical unit *граф* 'count'. However, in Russian this word has no particular relation to the funeral field. A more complex indirect interpretation is possible through a formal relation with the borrowed root of the word *графика* 'graphics' in this case, if the company is engaged in manufacturing funeral supplies and inscriptions. This association seems to be "forced", i.e., it is unlikely to be found by an ordinary native speaker. Nevertheless, there is no data about the company except its name.

Титан 'Titan'. There is a reference to ancient associations of a general nature.

КОПИ, ритуальное агентство 'MINE (?), funeral agency'. Strictly speaking, the word with such phonemic form in the Russian language exists – it means 'mine', but it is an archaism. Its writing with caps suggests that it is an abbreviation, but we do not have any supporting evidence.

Эллипс, ритуальная служба 'Ellipse, funeral service'. It is impossible to provide a semantic interpretation for this name. Perhaps the word is chosen as the name for reasons of euphony.

Эмма, салон ритуальных услуг 'Emma, funeral services salon'. The name is a female name, which is not among the most common ones, but we do not have data about the owner.

General observations for the corpus of Russian names

Thus, the entire corpus can be represented as follows (see also Table 1):

- 12% of the names refer to so-called "non-burial" companies, that is, companies for which the burial activity is not the core business;

- 24% of companies in the burial field of activity are limited to descriptive names, which are traditional mostly for the language of the Soviet period;
- 64% of companies prefer to build their name as “fully fledged” proper names. Among them,
 - 42% of companies are named with “predictable” associative orientation that allows, most likely, to interpret the true scope of the activity of the company;
 - 22% of companies are named with “unpredictable” associative orientation, i.e., it seems to be difficult to find an unambiguous correlation between the name and the burial area of activity. In our understanding, they are “unconventional”.

Table 1. Corpus composition

Names of “non burial” companies		12%	
Descriptive names of burial companies		24%	
“Fully fledged” proper name of burial companies	“predictable” association	64%	42%
	“unpredictable” association		22%

To prove the “unpredictability” of these names, we will show some overlap in the names of companies with different areas of activity. For example, we know *Рай* ‘Paradise’ – funeral agency and photo studio; *Эдем* ‘Eden’ – funeral agency and beauty parlour; *Пантеон* ‘Pantheon’ – funeral agency and travel agency; *Астрал* ‘Astral’ – funeral agency and trading company; *Лиц* ‘Face’ – funeral agency and hairdresser’s. And the list goes on.

In general, we can say that the tradition of naming in the field of funeral services is “at a turning point”. Because of their repeatability, traditional names cease to perform the function of individualising, and the creation of new names causes difficulties due to the specific areas of activity, which do not allow the use, to the full extent, of traditions and solutions encountered when creating a company name for other subcategories. Therefore, there will be a lot of changes in this part of onomastic space of the Russian language in the future.

From the religious point of view, the corpus shows that society has no consensus yet on religious self-determination, but the understanding comes on the fact that death as a cultural phenomenon requires sublime “transcendent” non-household attitude.

Comparative data in Bulgarian

In the present study, we found it interesting to compare the data of the Russian language with data of the Bulgarian language. The working hypothesis we have proposed was that a certain similarity of language mentality, cultural features and historical paths of the two peoples can be reflected in some similarity of the names systems in the considered areas. As the Bulgarian data themselves are not the subject of our study, we restrict ourselves to the indications of the similarities and most obvious differences.

The source for the Bulgarian material is a specialised website with a distinctive name *Погребение* 'Burial'¹², involving voluntary registration by the owners of relevant firms. The website contains 64 different names (geographically, it covers the whole of Bulgaria; we have eliminated duplicate names that may belong to different branches of the same company). Naturally, this number is not comparable with the total number of Bulgarian funeral companies, but as they are objectively united in one Internet text they can be regarded as an indicative cross-section, to a certain extent.

First of all, we shall note the similarities in the two corpora of names, which are often on the lexical level. *Память* 'memory', which is actively present in the Russian material, appears once in Bulgarian: Russian *Память*/ Bulgarian *Памет* 'memory'.

There occurred the full graphical coincidence of two names of stonecutting firms and funeral companies: Russian, Bulgarian *Обелиск* 'Obelisk'; Russian, Bulgarian *Рай* 'Paradise'.

The Russian name *Вечная память* 'Eternal memory' corresponds to Bulgarian *Вечен покой* 'Eternal peace', both referring to the funeral service.

The Bulgarian material also presents a block of "ancient names":

Акропол 'Acropolis'
Хермес 'Hermes'
Гея 'Gaea'

Some coincide with Russian by the logic of choice, in particular as regards names of mythical rivers of the underworld (Russian *Стикс* 'Styx'/ Bulgarian *Лета* 'Lethé') or names of mythological characters: Russian *Харон*/ Bulgarian *Харон*, *Харон*¹³ 'Charon'. One of these Bulgarian names is typed in the Latin alphabet; in the Russian material such writing does not occur, although it is very common for other categories of commercial names.

Finally, there is a full match: Russian, Bulgarian *Астрал* 'Astral'.

We shall recall that the group of names which refer in the associative way to non-Christian religions is represented in the Russian language only by two names: *Isis service* and *Avesta*. In the Bulgarian language such names are more numerous:

Амон Ра 'Amon Ra'
Анубис 'Anubis'
Реа-Кибела 'Rea-Cybele'

Moreover, there are names which are not only related to the aforementioned "ancient areas", but also to others:

¹² <http://www.pogrebenie.bg>

¹³ Although the comparison with the Polish material is beyond the scope of this article, we shall note that Badyda (2007: 31) finds 48 Charon names and 24 Styx in the Polish material, but across the whole country.

Велес 'Veles' (god of the Slavic mythology, which is, strictly speaking, not connected with the idea of burial)

Карма 'Karma' (the influence of Hinduism)

Тангра 'Tangra' (the character of a number of mythologies, including proto-Bulgarian)

The Bulgarian language also has a group of names that do not involve a logical connection with the burial area, such as:

Алфа 'Alpha'

Експерт 'Expert'

Ореол-99 'Aureola-99'

In the following, we will note striking differences.

There are very few descriptive names, only 10. Other companies with descriptive names may not have registered on this website. But in 5 cases, the main information load falls on the owner's name, for example: *Владимир Янакиев, траурна агенция* 'Vladimir Yanakiev, mourning agency'. This method seems to be impossible in the Russian tradition.

There is an interesting case of a false similarity with the external matching of a lexical unit: Russian *Обряд*/ Bulgarian *Обред* 'ceremony'. In Russian language the name is a synecdoche and it means a funeral ceremony, while the Bulgarian name suggests a ceremony in a broader sense, as the firm is engaged in the organisation of funerals and weddings (such a union is absolutely unusual for Russia).

Finally, there is a distinction that seemed the most revealing to us in terms of how societal values are reflected in the system of commercial names. The Bulgarian material has a number of such names:

Свети дух, погребална агенция 'Holy Spirit, Funeral agency'

Свети Архангел Михаил, погребална агенция 'Saint Michael the Archangel, Funeral agency'

Свети Афанасий 'Saint Athanasius'

Свети Димитър, погребална агенция 'Saint Dimitrios, Funeral agency'

Свети Лука, траурен дом 'Saint Luke, funeral home'

Света София, погребална агенция 'Saint Sophia, funeral agency'

These names openly profess Christianity, in which the idea of holiness and burial are inextricably linked (one of the main words of prayers in the Orthodox service is an appeal to God for the dead: "May s/he repose with all the saints..."), and such an open profession of Christianity is impossible in Russian language for a number of reasons.

Conclusion

The material provided in the article makes it possible to track changes in the language system, resulting from serious social shifts, manifested in particular in the

formation of a new subcategory of proper names within the category of company names. At the same time, in the field of name-giving, which is new for the language and the linguistic consciousness, the ideas about acceptable and conventional have not been developed yet. From a broader, linguistic and cultural perspective, this is a proof that commercial names as one of the most dynamic areas of the language, open to conscious human intervention, reflect visually and simultaneously in terms of the history of language the change of official ideological, social, religious and ethical ideas.

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