

## DIACHRONIC SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERM ONOMA

*Цю статтю присвячено діахронічному вивченню семантичного розвитку терміна *ὄνομα*. Подано інтерпретації таких провідних вчених Давньої Греції, як Геракліт, Демокріт, Платон та Арістотель. Доведено, що першим використав термін *ὄνομα* у значенні “власна назва” Ксенофонт. Надано етимологічну еволюцію терміна *ὄνομα*.*

**Ключові слова:** *ὄνομα*, іменник, суб'єкт, ім'я, ономастика.

*Данная статья посвящена диахроническому исследованию семантического развития термина *ὄνομα*. Приведены интерпретации таких выдающихся ученых Древней Греции, как Гераклит, Демокрит, Платон и Аристотель. Доказано, что первым использовал термин *ὄνομα* в значении “имя собственное” Ксенофонт. Предложена этимологическая эволюция термина *ὄνομα*.*

**Ключевые слова:** *ὄνομα*, существительное, субъект, имя, ономастика.

*The article is dedicated to the diachronic investigation of the semantic development of the term *ὄνομα*. Interpretations of such prominent ancient Greek scientists as Heraclitus, Democritus, Plato and Aristotle are presented. It is proven that the first to use the term *ὄνομα* in the meaning of a proper noun was Xenophon. Etymological evolution of *ὄνομα* is offered.*

**Key words:** *ὄνομα*, noun, subject, name, onomastics.

The main field of my present scientific interests embraces **onomastics** — the investigation of *nomina propria*, where historiography is closely interwoven with etymological studies. The term *ὄνομα* has a long and rather a complicated history, in which the role of the Ancient Greek historian, soldier and philosopher Xenophon is greatly underestimated. Hence, this article is to improve the present unjust state and clarify his contribution to the etymological shaping of this term.

Onyms and appellatives exist as the language universalia: in this way names of individual objects are differentiated from classes of identical objects. As F. Debus writes, “Nicht allein Personennamen, sondern prinzipiell

alle Namen haben eine [...] appellativische Wurzel” [1: 12]. Notwithstanding this genetic connection between proper names and common nouns the difference between them is principal, consequently, the term “name” should be applied only to onyms. Thus, the aim of this paper is to trace back historic changes in the meaning of the term **ὄνομα** and to establish the grindstone developments in its semantics.

Ancient Greece is a cradle of European linguistics, the language being first investigated by philosophers. As R. H. Robins says, “It is simply that the Greek thinkers on language, and on the problems raised by linguistic investigations, initiated in Europe the studies that we can call linguistic science in its widest sense, and that this science was a continuing focus of interest from ancient Greece until the present day” [2: 11].

The discussion on the nature of names, held by Heraclitus, the Weeping Philosopher, and Democritus, the Laughing Philosopher, was topical, one of its central notions being the term **ὄνομα**. This discussion concentrated on the problem of the relations between things and their names. Are names governed by the nature of things (φύσει), established by law (νόμῳ), by agreement (συνθήκη), by tradition (ἔθει), or by convention (θέσει)?

Heraclitus of Ephesus (540–480 BC) considered that each name was inseparably linked with the thing it names and that the name reflects the nature of the thing as we are reflected in the mirror: the language itself reflects the ambiguous nature of things [3: B48].

Democritus of Abdera (460–370 BC), on the contrary, taught that names are given on the basis of the convention [4: 1]. His proofs (these four arguments were presented in the commentary by Proclus [4: 1]) were the following: many words have several meanings, many concepts have more than one name, with the flow of time one word may be ousted by another, many concepts remain nameless [5: 13–14].

For our investigation the essence of the term “name” or **ὄνομα** in the works of Heraclitus and Democritus is of paramount importance. As it is possible to see from the examples above they made no difference between *nomina propria* and *nomina appellativa*, that is between proper and common nouns. Both classes were termed equally **ὄνομα**.

This famous discussion on things and the nature of their names is presented in Plato’s (427–347 BC) dialogue *Cratylus*. In this text such important for us issues, as “the origin of the language, or [...] the suitability of particular names to particular things” are discussed [6: 33]. As the narration goes, the character named Socrates is asked by Cratylus and Hermogenes to formulate whether names are “conventional” or “natural” and whether

the language is a system of arbitrary signs or words have an intrinsic relation to the things they signify. Hermogenes' point of view was analyzed by J. L. Ackrill as follows: "the word *onoma* (translated 'name') can cover both proper names and general or abstract names...; it can even be extended to include adjectives, or indeed any words", so later in the text the scientist summarizes it in the following words: "I shall usually speak of names, though many of the examples discussed in the *Cratylus* would not be usually called names by us, but words" [6: 36].

Both viewpoints — *θέσει* and *φύσει* — are disproved in this dialogue, and the third theory is brought forth: first, natural connections between the sounds of the word and the concept it named existed, the examples of which are onomatopoeic words, and later many other new words were derived from them, the inner connections of sounds and meanings being lost. At the same time the word remains connected with the concept due to the social convention: "I myself prefer the theory that names are, so far as is possible, like the things named; but really this attractive force of likeness is, as Hermogenes says, a poor thing, and we are compelled to employ in addition this commonplace expedient, convention, to establish the correctness of names. Probably language would be, within the bounds of possibility, most excellent when all its terms, or as many as possible, were based on likeness, that is to say, were appropriate, and most deficient under opposite conditions" [7: 435c].

This discussion on the correctness of names was extremely important for the development of linguistics, since Plato made an attempt to classify words into two categories: names (*ὄνομα*) and verbs (*ῥῆμα*). In Plato's interpretation, given in his dialogues *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, *ὄνομα* is a verbal expression of the subject of the proposition, while *ῥῆμα* is a verbal expression of the predicate of the proposition [8: 153]: to express something means to be "making one's thought apparent vocally by means of words (*ὄνομα*) and verbal expressions (*ῥῆμα*)" [9: 206d]. Thus, the problem of differentiation between appellatives and onyms with the help of different terms remains unsolved by Plato as well.

Aristotle (384–322 BC) in his *Organon* made a further attempt to classify all things that are nameable. Thus in the work *Categories* Aristotle places every object of human apprehension under one of ten categories (known to medieval writers as the Latin term *praedicamenta*). Aristotle intended them to enumerate everything that can be expressed without composition or structure, thus anything that can be either the subject or the predicate of a proposition, forming 10 grammatical categories. According to Aristo-

tle, the main parts of speech are the name and the verb. The former, which bears a specific interest to us, is understood as the noun in a general sense [10: 12–13]. Aristotle identified three components as central to the proposition: λόγος, ὄνομα and ῥῆμα [11: 102–103]. In the opinion of L. Formigari, “the use of the articulated voice for semantic purposes marks the transition from natural signs to symbols which, according to Aristotle, transforms mere vocal sounds into names” [12: 48]. According to G. E. L. Owen, the name in Aristotle’s interpretation is equal to the appropriate definition or paraphrase [13: 262]. The term ὄνομα in Aristotle’s works has a fivefold sense: every vocal form that signifies anything nameable, every vocal form, functioning as subject, every vocal form with conventional meaning without time, every vocal form which signifies something finite, every vocal form, excluding cases and infinite ὀνόματα [14]. As Aristotle wrote in his *Categories*: “Things are called homonymous when they have only a name in common but a different definition corresponding to the name. For example, both a human and a drawing are animals (Commentary: The Greek word ζῷον can mean either an animal or a figure in a picture; the latter need not be the figure of an animal)” [15: 694]. From the above example we see that Aristotle, using the word ὄνομα in this case meant a common name.

The first to use the word **ὄνομα** only in the meaning of a proper noun was Xenophon of Athens (430–354 BC) [16: 46]: πόλις Θάψαχος ὀνόματι [17: 1178]. He writes in *Cyropaedia*: “The father of Cyrus is said to have been Cambyses, king of the Persians: this Cambyses belonged to the stock of the Persidae, and the Persidae derive their name from Perseus” [18].

Thus, it is possible to draw the conclusion, that it was Xenophon who laid the grindstone of ancient onomastics by terming *nomina propria* by a separate and exact word, though he was predominantly interested in historical issues. All due respect should be given to him for eliminating this particular terminological ambiguity.

The term **ὄνομα** was translated differently depending on the context of the discussion — in grammar it was presented as noun, while in logic as subject. It was only in the 12th century that grammarians began to think in terms we understand as subject [19: 29].

As to the historical development of the term **ὄνομα**, it came to Ancient Greek from Proto-Indo-European: prefix ὀ + I. E. momn̥ (name) [20: 1260]. In Ancient Greek it acquired the form of ὄνομα, which possessed the following meanings: 1) name; 2) fame; 3) word; 4) excuse; 5) common name, word (ῥήματα καὶ ὀνόματα (Plato)) 6) proper name [17: 1178]. In Modern Greek the spelling and meanings of this term are the following:

ὄνομα — 1) name, e.g. το ὄνομά μου είναι... (my name is ...); 2) (figuratively) name, reputation, 2) το καλό ὄνομα της εταιρείας (the good name of the company); 3) (grammar) substantive, noun. The dominant meaning today is a proper name, which has become an object of the branch of linguistics termed onomastics — 1.1) the science or study of the origins and forms of words especially as used in a specialized field; 1.2) the science or study of the origin and forms of proper names of persons or places; 2) the system underlying the formation and use of words especially for proper names or of words used in a specialized field [21].

At the present moment a number of onomastic societies function in the world, among which it is possible to mention The International Council of Onomastic Sciences, which publishes the journal *Onoma*, The American Name Society, the publications of which are presented in *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, The English Place-Name Society with its *Journal of the English Place-name Society*, The Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland and its journal *Nomina*, as well as many others. In Ukraine the Onomastic Commission functions in the National Academy of Sciences and several onomastic journals are regularly published: *Onomastics and Etymology*, *Logos onomastiki*, *Opera in onomastica*, *Onomastics and Appellatives*, and others. Onomastic studies embrace an enormous field, comprising geographical, lexicological, lexicographical, semiotic, textual, psychological, sociological, cognitive aspects of proper names, which require further multivector investigations, based on new modern approaches and innovative methods.

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