

## C.1. Description for the general public

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### ***Semantics and pragmatics of proper names. The onomastic definition of proper name and the theory and practice of naming policy***

**Proper names** (or: *nomina propria, propria* or onyms) constitute the subject of interest of diverse sciences and disciplines – e.g. of linguistics, logic and philosophy of language. All these disciplines take a slightly (or sometimes completely) different perspective in the way they perceive proper names but they all have serious problems with *nomina propria*. At a glance it seems quite obvious what a proper name is. Everybody is able to give examples of proper names easily. However, it quickly turns out that such expressions as *Anna, Hamlet, William Shakespeare, Ben, Scotland, London, United Nations, Empire State Building, Rolls-Royce, Walmart, Romeo and Juliet, the Poles* and *the Smiths* are hardly possible to be reduced to the lowest common denominator, especially when it comes to the answer to the question whether proper names do have meaning and if they do, then what kind of meaning it is.

The branch of linguistics specialized in research on proper names is called **onomastics**. The fundamental problem, however, consists in the fact that onomastics does not possess its own definition of proper name. This is caused by the very history of the discipline: onomastics emerged from historical linguistics, etymological studies, and dialectology. Traditionally it paid attention to origins of proper names (and may easily explain that the name of the Polish city of *Częstochowa* comes from a male given name *Częstoch* /which has not been given for ages and now does not occur any more/, that the river name *San* must have been given long before the Slavs arrived to the surroundings of the river and that in the past the Slavs surely inhabited the territories where nowadays the cities of Vienna and Berlin are located).

On the other hand, onomastics has shown much less interest in the field of semantics of proper names (i.e. in theory regarding the relation between a name and the named object). Thus, the discipline is not able to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of **what a proper name actually is** and in what way proper names mean something and stand for something. Onomastics tends to “borrow” definitions and conceptions of proper name from logic and philosophy of language. However, these “imported” solutions take into account neither the “non-logical” nature of natural languages nor the history, origins and formal properties of proper names, which are – as we have just seen – the primary subject of interest to onomastics.

**The aim of this project** is to develop an autonomous onomastic definition of proper name and a theory of proper name meaning, which will take into account material-based findings of onomastics and its research methodology, making it independent of the “import” of logical and philosophical conceptions, which are – from the perspective of onomastics – rather inadequate.

Proper names do have meaning (which is the problem to be faced by the proposed ***semantics of proper names***) but they may be “used” by speakers for various reasons as well: by giving or using a proper name one may show emotions towards a named object, manifest claims or opinions, or even try to convince somebody to a specific action (cf. sophisticated names given by real estate developers in order to “change” blocks of flats into exclusive residential districts). Thus, proper names do have their **pragmatics** as well, which is to be theorized in this research project.

Both the semantics and pragmatics of proper names may be employed in designing more general rules of giving and using proper names. Such general regulations (written down or not) may constitute a naming policy. A naming policy may be carried out by various entities: individuals (cf. parents who name their children according to specific criteria or a specific plan, real estate developers who create names conveying prestige, and, first of all, a state which in acts and laws defines the way given names, surnames, geographical names and even names of products and companies are to be given and used). In Poland, a part of naming policy consists of the so-called *decommunization law* from 2016, which caused the street name *aleja Armii Ludowej* to be changed into *ulica Lecha Kaczyńskiego*. A further goal of this project is the development of a **theory of naming policy**, which will take into account the linguistic and onomastic view on proper names (paying special attention to their semantic, pragmatic and formal aspects).

Material-based (classificatory and etymological) findings of onomastics will be analysed in search for any semantic, pragmatic and formal elements present in proper names. These empirical onomastic findings will be then generalized in order to produce a general theory of proper name meaning and a definition of proper name. Due to the fact that naming policy partially overlaps with what is called language policy, a survey of existent theories of language policy will be done in search for any elements relevant to proper names.

The final part of the project consists in analysis and description (in terms of the newly developed theories) of naming policies in Central and Eastern Europe since the mid-19th century to the present day.