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Glossonymics as a University Curricular Reality

ABSTRACT

Glossonymics (<Gr. *glossa* ‘language’ + *onyma* ‘name’) is a linguistic discipline studying language names, their origin and development, their formation, meaning, uses, taxonomies and classifications, etc. Despite its salient theoretical and practical relevance, the aforementioned realm is still in its earlier stage of development, this being highlighted by the fact that the term for language names (and for a respective discipline) has not been unified.

The hitherto identified glossonymic taxons are relevant, however, insufficient. Some occasionally occurring terms and notions can in no way represent a systemic picture of existing relations. A more intensive inclusion of issues of glossonymics in academic circulation will allow us to solve problems associated with their taxonomies and classifications.

Glossonymics is also concerned with problems of relationships of language names with respective ethnonyms, choronyms, toponyms, and/or politonyms. As a rule, the majority of glossonyms have been derived from them; however, there are some reverse cases, and they should receive due attention.

As for descriptions of glossonyms for individual languages and language families and/or groups, they should be dealt with both within a historical framework and based on contemporary references (for instance, ISO 639; Glottolog). Adequate application skills of these resources are a necessary part of a would-be linguist’s professional competence.

Various problems pertaining to glossonymics can be discussed both within a course of an individual language or a language family and within a framework of a specialized course; the former normally occurs in materials of virtually every such course and the latter still awaits its implementation. It is such a specialized course that will provide for the teaching of glossonymics in its completeness and consistency.

Keywords: *glossonymics; language names; university education*

Introduction

No matter whether we conceive the need for a linguistic discipline concerned with language names, when giving a language course, we normally provide our students with at least sketchy information about how a language in question is referred to; less frequently, but still we have to instruct them about do’s and don’ts of language-naming practices. Both in teaching and research we come across the aforementioned and other aspects associated with it and commonly observe outwardly mutually exclusive circumstances: on the one hand, one is

confused by the occurrence of redundant and competing terms and, on the other, of insufficient notions and respective terminological designations. These are evident properties of an underdeveloped field and they are about what we should refer to as *glossonymics*, a linguistic discipline studying language names, their origin and development, their formation, meaning, uses, taxonomies and classifications, etc.

Truly enough, despite its salient theoretical and practical relevance, the aforementioned realm is still in its earlier stage of development. One of the manifestations of this circumstance is the fact that the term for the basic object, a ‘language name’ (hence, for the respective discipline), has not been unified. Multiple competing terms occur across the literature; here are some of them: *glossonym*, *glottonym*, *linguonym*, *linguanym*, *logonym*, etc. I opt for the term *glossonym* (<Gr. *glossa* ‘language’ + *onyma* ‘name’)¹; hence, for a name of the respective field, I favor *glossonymics*. Therefore, throughout the present paper I will use the term *glossonym* to refer to a language name and *glossonymics* to refer to the discipline that studies language names.

Entities and taxons

What has already been demonstrated in the foregoing, no matter how explicitly, is that a glossonym should be conceived of as a basic unit of glossonymic studies. Ultimately, a glossonym is a language name², this including names of individual languages and their varieties and of genetic and areal groupings of languages. It is undoubtedly of particular significance to identify and define it; however, alongside this, we have to take a look at their relationship schemes, that is, what taxons are identified and what their organization is.

Cysouw & Good (2013, p. 340) identified three important inherent relations among glossonyms (and not among their referents): spelling variants, language-specific morphological variants, and etymologically related variants, and proposed ‘homology’ as a cover term for these relations: On the synchronic side, linguists would normally refer to homologous glossonyms via concepts like derivation, inflection, or compounding (depending on the grammatical details). On the diachronic side, linguists would normally refer to homology using notions like cognate or loanword (depending on the historical scenario)³.

For example, the glossonyms ‘ქართული’ (in Georgian), ‘Georgian’ (in English), ‘gürcüce’ (in Turkish), ‘грузинский’ (in Russian), ‘Հրացերեն’ (in Armenian), etc. are not homologous because they do not enter into any of the aforementioned inherent relations. On the contrary, if we take glossonyms for another Kartvelian language, we will be able to observe

that ‘მარგალური’ (in Megrelian), ‘მეგრული’ (in Georgian), ‘Megrelian’ and ‘Mingrelian’ (in English), ‘агырца’ (in Abkhazian), ‘мегрельский’ and ‘мингрельский’ (in Russian), and the like do form a homologous set as far as all of them are in an inherent relationship with each other.

Another type of taxonomic relation, albeit indirectly associated with the aforementioned one, is represented by the following taxons: *autoglossonym/endoglossonym* ‘a language name used by native speakers,’ and *alloglossonym/exoglossonym* ‘a language name used by speakers of other languages;’ for example, the designation ‘ქართული’ is an autoglossonym (//endoglossonym) for Georgian (that is, how Georgians refer to their mother tongue), whereas ‘Georgian’ (in English), ‘gürcüce’ (in Turkish), ‘грузинский’ (in Russian), ‘Հրացերեն’ (in Armenian) are alloglossonyms (//exoglossonyms) for the same language (that is, how speakers of other languages refer to Georgian). One should admit that these are very significant taxons, however, rather insufficient. Occasionally occurring items like ‘subglottonym’ (Gabinski, 1997, p. 212), ‘biblioglossonym’ (Barrett & Johnson, 2001, p. 857) and ‘pseudoglossonym’ (Díaz-Fernández, 2006, p. 100) are not of systemic character. Given the significance of synchronic and diachronic aspects of glossonymy, Matisoff’s (1986, p. xiii) two coinages: ‘paleonym’ and ‘neonym’ (for older and new language names) should be considered whenever relevant.

I believe that a more intensive inclusion of issues of glossonymics in academic circulation will enable us to solve at least some of the problems associated with their taxonomies and classification.

Glossonyms and respective entities

Alongside the aforementioned, glossonymics is concerned with problems of relationships of language names with respective ethnonyms, choronyms, toponyms, and/or politonyms. Naturally enough, these entities are essentially interconnected, and, most commonly, the majority of language names have been derived from them, more frequently, from ethnonyms (Back, 1988); hence, the notion and term ‘ethnoglossonym’ as a name of both a people and their language (see, for instance, Rader, 1989, p. 28). Alongside this overwhelming practice, there are instances of the other way round, that is when ethnonyms and demonyms are derived from respective glossonyms: for instance, the “term Maya is a “linguonym, since the ethnonym (the name for a people) is derived from the language the people spoke” (Muse-Orlinoff, 2014,

p. 16). Of course, this is just one of the other, not few examples of the phenomenon in point (see, for instance, Kikvidze, 2013, pp. 195-196).

It is of utmost significance not to treat the aforementioned relations in a simplified way, thus to avoid confusions and falsities. For instance, ქართული (*kartuli* ‘Georgian’) and სვანური (*svanuri* ‘Svan’) are glossonyms for two sister languages, their respective ethnonyms being ქართველი (*kartveli*) and სვანი (*svani*); however, the latter are not parallel entities as far as all Svans are ethnic Georgians in the same way as Kartlians, Kakhetians, Mtiulians, Imeretians, etc. while their respective glossonyms are actually hyponyms, that is, subglossonyms referring to the territorial dialects of Georgian. Thus, as glossonyms, *Georgian* and *Svan* are parallel entities, whereas, as ethnonyms, they are incommensurable since *Georgian* is a superordinate and *Svan* is a hyponym.

Codes and tags

Whenever language names are concerned, one definitely feels the need for an unbiased, universally accepted system for their representation. In the early 1960s, the Library of Congress introduced the *MARC Code List of Languages* (normally, consisting of three-character lowercase alphabetic strings usually based on the first three letters of the English form of the corresponding language name) used as a tagset for its holdings. The ISO 639 family of standards appeared in the same period⁴, and it still is one of the most adequate and consistent systems for the representation of names of languages. Its two earlier substandards (ISO 639-1 and ISO 639-2) quickly became insufficient and, hence, obsolete, paving way to ISO 639-3 which, as different from its forerunners, consisted of three-letter codes and thus “no longer faced quantitative limitations ($26^3=17576$)” (Kikvidze, 2013, p. 197); presently, it contains 7,893 entries. However, the capacious volume did not spare it from some utter inadequacies; for instance, ISO 639-3 provides three-letter codes for six (!) Kartvelian (South Caucasian) languages:

Table 1. ISO 639-3 codes for the Kartvelian languages

| Code | Language |
|------------|--------------|
| <i>kat</i> | Georgian |
| or | |
| <i>geo</i> | |
| <i>oge</i> | Old Georgian |

| | |
|------------|----------------|
| <i>jge</i> | Judeo-Georgian |
| <i>lzz</i> | Laz |
| <i>sva</i> | Svan |
| <i>xmf</i> | Megrelian |

The most problematic aspect is that the substandard assigns an individual code for Judeo-Georgian which is just one of the varieties of the Georgian language.

Another substandard (ISO 639-5) was designed for the representation of names for language families and branches; here is how the names for the Caucasian language family are represented in it:

Table 2. ISO 639-5 codes for the Caucasian language family

| Code | Family/Branch |
|------------|---------------------------|
| <i>cau</i> | Caucasian languages |
| <i>ccs</i> | South Caucasian languages |
| <i>ccn</i> | North Caucasian languages |

It is not clear whether those behind the venture wanted to portray the Caucasian languages as a *Sprachbund* or as a (macro-)family. This kind of representation is definitely inadequate and can only be interpreted as an outcome either of one's incompetence or of an attempt to draw political borders between and among genetically related languages.

2009 saw the introduction of another substandard (ISO 639-6: Alpha-4 representation for comprehensive coverage of language variation). The substandard, consisting four-letter codes, presents a host of inconsistencies associated with Caucasian languages; some of the inconsistencies have been dealt with in Gippert (2012) and Kikvidze (2012). In another work, J. Gippert and M. Tandashvili revisit the problem in question concluding that "it is more than doubtful that the complex interrelationship between the chronological, dialectal, and other "lectal" layers of Georgian can at all be depicted adequately in a flat tree structure of the given sort" (Gippert & Tandashvili, 2015, p. 320). It is noteworthy that in the period between when the chapter was submitted and published the aforementioned standard was withdrawn.

The ISO 639 is not the only codeset for languages and their variation. The Glottolog project, as a comprehensive catalogue of the world's languages, assigns a unique and stable identifier to all linguistic entities, that is, families, individual languages and their varieties (Nordhoff & Hammarström, 2011).

The ever-booming IT industry requires specific tags usable for various applications. While language codes are static lists, language tags “allow for specifying deviations from default values of a given language in a certain text written or spoken in the according language. Therefore, they account for certain degrees of variation in language and are used like annotations rather than identifiers” (Kim & Breuer, 2017, p. 193). It is noteworthy that most of tags and subtags are normally associated with various ISO standards (for instance, *IANA language subtag registry*).

The aforementioned resources should be applied both as references and class material for analysis and discussion within the framework of a course in glossonymics.

Glossonyms and identity issues

Since languages and their varieties are intertwined with their speakers’ ethnic identities, that is, the way how individuals label themselves as members, representatives of a certain ethnic group, one can easily imagine the role of language names in processes of identity maintenance, of shaping and even reshaping identities, including political manipulations. It is us, humans who assign names to languages and their varieties (in other words, are engaged in a process of ‘glottonomaturgia,’ as referred to by Marco Trizzino, 2020, pp. 371-417), and we have various motivations; our motivations and attitudes are revealed in ultimate outcomes of our language-naming practices. In a section about glossonyms and associated entities, I noted that, most commonly, the majority of language names were derived from respective ethnonyms, choronyms, toponyms, and/or politonyms. Notably, the other way round is also possible; its most illustrative examples are the following: the Greek *barbarian* referring to non-Greek-speaking foreigners (lit. ‘a stammerer’); the Slavic *nemec* referring to all non-Slavic speaking foreigners (lit. ‘a dummy’); etc. Therefore, auto-/allo-glossonymic oppositions may have various implications. One of the implications is about an ethno/lingua-centric character of a number of glossonyms, “that is, in translation, they lose and acquire culturally specific shades of meaning, thus, becoming somewhat deictic; specifically, what one considers as — babbling, stupid, and even savage, is another individual’s mother tongue” (Kikvidze, 2013, p. 196). Thus, language-naming practices are associated with ethical issues, and it is linguists who should take on particular responsibility when confronted with choices of glossonyms; however, some of them do not seem to have much consensus about respective principles (see, for instance, Haspelmath, 2017; Dryer, 2019).

Glossonyms, as not only names *per se* but also as symbols, are quite infrequently utilized in constructions of identity and ideological campaigns, hence, are involved in activities aimed at partition and merger of languages (resp. language varieties); this is why they are closely associated with the notions of glossotomy, glossogamy, and schizoglossia (Goebel, 1979). As C. M. B. Brann claims, it was him who “coined the terms glossotomy and glossogamy for these movements of planned divergence and convergence” (Brann, 1994, p. 178). A very good example of these opposite processes is the still contested glossonym ‘Macedonian’ and identity of its speakers; here is a brief description of the situation in question (Lubliner, 2006): Macedonian Slavs were regarded – and regarded themselves – as Bulgarians until the Balkan Wars of the early twentieth century, when the part of Macedonia that did not belong to Greece or Bulgaria was annexed by Serbia and called South Serbia. It retained this designation in the kingdom of Yugoslavia, where an effort was made to Serbianize the population. This attempt failed, and under Tito the Macedonians were given nationality status, a republic, and a standard language. But this standard was based, not surprisingly, on dialects as far as possible from Bulgarian proper, and the Cyrillic script chosen for it is much closer to Serbian than to Bulgarian Cyrillic. Of course, Bulgarians and Macedonians communicate orally with ease.

As it is seen from the foregoing, the community underwent both processes – split with Bulgarian identity and merger with Serbian identity, and the glossonym was used as an instrument in these endeavors.

All over the world, there are abounding cases associated with processes of ethnic/national identity construction across various communities, and, thereby, language names are used not only as instruments but sometimes as weapons as well.

In this sense, phenomena pertaining to glossonymics extend their scope beyond linguistics. Peetermans reflects on the circumstance in point in the following way: The fact that glottonyms are ideologically or politically charged, on the one hand, and that the outcome of the naming process is determined by socio-politically motivated human agency, on the other, means that glottonyms can serve as gateways to study the social processes and attitudes that underlie them. (Peetermans, 2016, p. 120).

A diachronic perspective

There is no one-to-one relationship between a language and a glossonym; thus, there are languages referred to by multiple names and there are glossonyms referring to more than one language. Moreover, a glossonym may undergo semantic modifications through time, and

sometimes these modifications may lead to drastic outcomes, thus producing confusions and erroneous associations.

When addressing the problem of alloglossonyms for the Georgian language in the earlier literature, one comes across the following items: *Iberian*, *Georgian*, and even *Grusinisch*, hardly referring to its autoglossonym (and there is nothing unusual in it). Unlike the tendency, the Dutch physician and writer Olfert Dapper reports that the language spoken throughout the country (Georgia) is called *Kardueli* (Dapper, 1672, p. 709). This seems to be the first-ever, though not the last reference to Georgian by its autoglossonym in foreign literature. This is a notable example and, together with similar ones, should be spotlighted by diachronic glossonymics.

An illustrative example of the significance of a diachronic perspective of glossonymic studies is found in George Ellis's book, containing the earliest English-Caucasian lexicographic collections (Ellis, 1788). Kikvidze and Pachulia studied the resource in point having not spared how Ellis dealt with language names; they note that the author refers to individual Kartvelian languages as "dialects," thus identifying three entities: "Carduel Dialect," "Imeretian Dialect," and "Swaneti Dialect." In fact, the idioms referred to are languages per se. His further terminological blunders (mildly speaking) include the designations "Carduel Dialect" to refer to the Georgian language and, egregiously erroneous, "Imeretian Dialect" not to refer to an actual dialect of Georgian spoken in the province of Imereti but rather to Megrelian, as one of the Kartvelian languages (Kikvidze & Pachulia, 2019, p. 452).

Hence, 'Imeretian,' as it occurs in the aforementioned book, is not a pseudoglossonym but rather an erroneous shortcut. However, it is a glossonym, and we should be aware of all adequate and inadequate instances of its use within a diachronic perspective.

1993 saw the publication of a volume, including contributions by Georgian historians, ethnographers and linguists, about terms referring to Georgia and the Georgians (Paichadze, 1993); since language names are essentially interconnected with respective ethnonyms, toponyms, politonyms, demonyms, etc., one would logically expect to find discussions on glossonyms at least in some of the contributions. Actually, glossonyms appear to have been given very limited, if any, space in the volume in point. This is a shortcoming which should be rectified both for the sake of glossonymics (and linguistics, at large) and of history, ethnography, etc. as well. There is a good example of how language names can and should be studied in a diachronic perspective; it is a French project within which nomenclatural representations of languages were dealt with in various ancient grammatical traditions

(Aussant, 2009). It is a good example and a role model for further studies owing to the outcomes of the research: documented discussions of language-naming practices based on data mined from ancient grammatical texts. I believe that another very productive venture would be studies of glossonyms for individual languages and language families and/or groups as they occur in later resources, for instance, in the so called polyglottic collections compiled by G. Postellus, C. Gesner, H. Megiser, J. Adelung, etc.

Languoids

What I should initially do in this section is provide a definition of the term *languoid*; for the sake of this, I choose to refer to those who introduced it (Good & Hendryx-Parker, 2006, p. 5) stating that it is a cover term for any type of lingual entity: language, dialect, family, language area, etc. It is roughly similar to the term *taxon* from biological taxonomy, except it is agnostic as to whether the relevant linguistic grouping is considered to be genealogical or areal (or based on some other possible criteria for grouping languages).

It goes without saying that the reader easily understands that the label is coined (En. *langu[age]* + Gr. *-oid* ‘x-like entity’) in order to avoid confusions associated with notorious language/dialect distinctions; but why do we deal with them in a discussion of glossonyms? Normally, glossonyms are proper names assigned to individual languoids; there is an association, although not an immediate one. What I mean is that the French school of glossonymics suggests a broader understanding of what we know to be glossonyms, that is, not only language names proper such as *Georgian*, *Greek*, *Latin*, etc., but also notions such as *language*, *dialect*, *idiom*, etc. One of their arguments is that the border between language names proper and languoids are sometimes fluid; there are some bright examples of the aforementioned such as ‘Creole/creole’ (Tabouret-Keller, 1997), ‘Koine/koine’ (Siegel, 1985), ‘Lingua Franca/lingua franca’ (Brosch, 2015), etc.

What Brosch states about the ‘Lingua Franca/lingua franca’ problem (that is, a distinction to be made between a glossonym as a proper name and a term for a language (resp. a language variety)) can be easily extended to other, similar cases: it is highly advisable to use lower-case *lingua franca* only for the common noun (with indefinite article), viz. the figurative use, leaving upper-case *Lingua Franca* for the original Mediterranean pidgin, in accordance with the general rules of capitalization in English (Brosch, 2015, p. 73).

With its implications to various fields such as linguistic terminology and history of linguistics, to name but a few, this approach is not only logical but quite adequate and

productive for glossonymics, thus opening avenues for new insights for the investigation of both already explored and so far unexplored phenomena.

Conclusion

I would not dare to claim that glossonymics already exists as a full-fledged discipline; however, it is more than evident that problems pertaining to glossonymics do exist and they should be studied in a more profound and consistent way than it has been done so far, subsequently offering new insights not only for various branches of linguistics but also for the humanities at large and even beyond.

In the title of one of his presentations, Andy Peetermans referred to it as “a could-be subfield of onomastics” (Peetermans, 2016); whether a subfield or not, I believe that glossonymics is a *should-be* curricular reality at our universities.

The aforementioned and other problems pertaining to glossonymics can be discussed both within a course of an individual language or a language family and within a framework of a specialized course; the former normally occurs in materials of virtually every such a course and the latter still awaits its implementation. It is such a specialized course that can and will provide for the teaching of glossonymics in its completeness and consistency.

NOTES:

1. A comprehensive and detailed socioterminological discussion of these and other, related items will be presented in a forthcoming paper; however, here I will refer to the earliest, at least to my knowledge, instances of the occurrence of the following terms: ‘linguonym’ (Duličenko, 1973) and ‘glottonym’ (Kahane & Kahane, 1976).
2. Some authors prefer ‘language labels’ to ‘language names’ (see, for instance, Khubchandani, 1983, p. 48).
3. Distinct terms (and a distinct taxonomy) were offered by Matisoff (1986, p. ix): “It is useful to distinguish between genuinely different names for the same people/language — i.e. *allonyms* — and merely different spellings or pronunciations of the same name — i.e. *allograms*.”
4. For a comprehensive description of the development of language-related standards, see, for instance, Dalby et al., 2004; Kamusella, 2012.

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