

Two terminological suggestions: *Dionym(y)* and *nominabilia*

Richard Coates*

University of the West of England, Bristol

To cite this article: Coates, Richard. 2022. Two terminological suggestions: *Dionym(y)* and *nominabilia*. *Onoma* 57, 217–226. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.57/2022/14

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.57/2022/14>

© *Onoma* and the author.

Article history

Received on 20 August 2021.

Final form accepted on 15 December 2022.

Published online on 31 January 2023.

Two terminological suggestions: *Dionym(y)* and *nominabilia*

Abstract: This article is about two concepts for which terms do not appear in the current (September 2022) English-language version of the ICOS terminology database. Two terms that are in principle usable cross-linguistically with minimal adaptation are suggested to fill the gaps.

Keywords: *Dionym(y)*, *nominabilia*; *eponym(y)*.

Deux suggestions terminologiques : *Dionym(y)* et *nominabilia*

Résumé : Cet article porte sur deux concepts pour lesquels aucun terme n'apparaît dans la version anglaise actuelle (septembre 2022) de la base de données terminologique ICOS. Deux termes qui sont en principe utilisables de manière interlinguistique avec adaptation minimale sont suggérés pour combler les lacunes.

Mots-clés : *Dionym(y)*, *nominabilia*; *eponym(y)*.

* Contact: richard.coates@uwe.ac.uk

Zwei terminologische Vorschläge: *Dionym(y)* und *nominabilia*

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Artikel geht es um zwei Begriffe, für die Fachausdrücke in der aktuellen (September 2022) englischsprachigen Version der ICOS-Terminologiedatenbank nicht vorkommen. Um die Lücken zu füllen, werden zwei Ausdrücke vorgeschlagen, die im Prinzip sprachübergreifend mit minimaler Anpassung verwendbar sind.

Schlüsselbegriffe: *Dionym(y)*, *nominabilia*; *eponym(y)*.

Two terminological suggestions: *Dionym(y)* and *nominabilia*

RICHARD COATES

1. *Dionym(y)*, proceeding from *eponym(y)* and its relatives

The term *eponym* has been well established since the mid-nineteenth century, first used in George Grote's *History of Greece* (1846: I. i. vii. 210), but it seems that it is beginning to be applied in a way that puts clarity at risk, at least in non-technical writing in English. The primary denotation of its Ancient Greek etymon ἐπώνυμος *epōnumos* was an individual whose name provided the name of, or an expression for, another individual or concept, and that was also Grote's usage. (The Greek prefix is ἐπί- *epi-* 'upon, after, on top of, because of'.) The newly derived expression could be identical with the source's name or embedded in a morphologically or syntactically more complex construction. It is a strange term from the perspective of modern classificatory onomastics, since it originally denoted a person or thing (etc.), rather than the name of that person or thing (etc.), as terms in *-onym* generally mean (e.g. *toponym*, *anthroponym*, *oikonym*). The theoretical boundary between a "thing" and its "name" was once arguably more blurred than it is in the modern (post-Saussurean) linguistics of the sign; the name of the thing, distinct from the thing itself, can today be viewed as the eponym. So classically, king Pelops (or now also *Pelops*) was the eponym of *the Peloponnese* ('Pelops' island'). Berlin or *Berlin*, Germany, is the eponym of many a *Berlin*, USA (though not all; Stewart 1970: 44). *Namib*, as in the Namib Desert, is the eponym of *Namibia*. Chelsea (a quarter of London) or *Chelsea* is the eponym of *Chelsea Football Club* and the lexical items *Chelsea pensioner*, *Chelsea boot*, *Chelsea bun* and *Chelsea tractor* ('four-wheel-drive or off-road vehicle which is used predominantly in urban areas' (*Oxford English dictionary* (OED) 2021)).

Let us be tidy and define an eponym as the name serving as the source expression, rather than as the denotatum of that name; this is the position adopted in the ICOS List of Key Onomastic Terms: "proper name of a person or group of persons, forming the basis of the name of another person, family, place, object etc." I should re-emphasize that the earlier usage in which the eponym is understood to be the denotatum itself is strongly established. However, in most cases any problem caused by blurring the boundary between

the two understandings will be philosophical rather than pragmatic. It will matter little whether we name a street after a person (a name-bearer) or derive our street-name from that person's name; so the purpose and usefulness of dictionaries of eponyms such as those of Beeching (1990) and Freeman (1998) will not be undermined.

Especially in the second part of the twentieth century, and at least in English, there has been a slight tendency to loosen this relatively clear definition. In the latest online version of the *OED*, for example, we find a new, extended sense in a draft addition dated 1993:

- c. A proper name used generically; more loosely, the generic name itself, or any noun phrase of specific meaning which includes a proper name.
 1885 *J[ou]rn[al] [of] Nerv[ous] & Mental Dis[ease]* 12 [p.] 349 The very awkward dionymic eponym, *Circulus Willisii*.
 1946 J. Dobson *Anatomical Eponyms* [p.] 2 A great many of the old and well-known eponyms that perpetuated the names of some of the masters of Anatomy have been successfully eliminated.
 1960 G. R. Fraser *Deafness with Goitre (Syndrome of Pendred)* (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of London) [p.] 3 The name Pendred is suggested as a suitable eponym for this syndrome... A... study of sixty-two cases of Pendred's syndrome in forty-one sibships is described.
 1982 *Daily Tel[egraph]* 23 Dec. [pp.] 6/7 Some eponyms are euphemisms of a sort – Casanova, dunce and lush, for instance.

The quotation of 1960 first uses *Pendred* in the classical sense adjusted to include a name as well as the relevant individual, and I cannot understand why *OED* associates it with the new sense c.: the medical term *Pendred's syndrome* includes (the surname of) the person after whom the syndrome is named. That of 1946 seems to invert the eponymy relation, and therefore initiates the terminological problem that provokes the writing of this note; as with the anatomical term *islets of Langerhans* often being replaced by *pancreatic islets*, the former expression being viewed as the eponym. The 1982 quotation goes further and uses *eponym* to mean any deonymic lexeme, but does not address the usage of the eponym in more complex constructions. A strict definition of the relevant range of usage is required. The 1885 quotation is interestingly complex. *Circulus Willisii* denotes a circulatory anastomosis (a kind of surgically created link between two structures) supplying blood to the brain and surrounding structures. The eponym in the classical sense is Dr Thomas Willis or the surname *Willis*. But the writer treats *Circulus Willisii* as the eponym (cf. the quotation of 1946). As if to acknowledge the inversion of the lexical relationship between the two expressions, he (Dr Burt G. Wilder) introduces the adjective *dionymic*, in which the prefix appears to be Greek διά-

dia-, arguably in the sense ‘because of’.¹ The *Circulus* is named because of *Willis*. This proves useful.

In a wider perspective, the quotations of 1946 and 1982, and the *OED* definition **c.** that they legitimize, are not simply errors in understanding the relation between derived expressions and the names that underlie them. Morphologically, they share something of the denotational relationship between the geological terms *centre* and *epicentre*; the centre of an earthquake is where geological movement is actually initiated in the Earth’s crust, and the epicentre is a derived notion: a point on the earth’s surface where the earthquake is experienced, caused by, and perpendicularly above, the event at the centre.

What English onomastics lacks is an agreed term for an expression that derives from an eponym, whether by simply adding a denotation to it or by embedding it in a more complex referring expression. Since the discipline internationally mainly retains terminology of Greek derivation, there is virtue in remaining consistent, but the task is made harder because terms in *-onym(y)* are already in widespread use in linguistics and scientific nomenclature for concepts that have nothing to do with proper names as such (*homonymy*, *synonymy*, *hyponymy*, *antonymy*, *taxonymy*, *acronymy*...). But if we do not wish to start completely afresh with terminology, we have to scrape the barrel. So for this concept we might have considered *metonym* from Greek *μετά- meta-* ‘after’ (as in “naming after”), but *metonymy* was, with a different sense, an established technical term of rhetoric in Antiquity, and in English since at least *Wilson (1553)*. It remains so in modern semantics (*Traugott & Dasher 2001: 27–29*; *Dirven & Pörings 2002*; *Allan 2008: 10–13*; *Cruse 2011: 256–259*), though it was practically suppressed in late twentieth-century linguistics. Alternatively, with different spatial metaphors, we might consider *aponym* from *ἀπό- apo-* ‘standing away from’ (among other senses), or *dionym* from *διά- dia-* ‘through, across; because of’ (among other senses).² At least in English, these terms have not already been claimed, except insofar as *dionymic* appears in the 1885 quotation above. (But this has no entry of its own in *OED* (!), and the term(s) are not found in widely consulted English-language dictionaries or encyclopedias of linguistics such as *Trask 1993*; *Crystal 2008*; *Malmkjær 2010*; *Matthews 2014*; nor are they mentioned by *Brink 2016* in his discussion of eponymy.)³

¹ I find it harder to interpret *di-* in Wilder’s *dionymic* as meaning ‘two, double’.

² The morphophonemic reduction of *dia-* to *di-* before a vowel might in principle give rise to a problem; see footnote 3. But the reduction was already firmly established in Ancient Greek.

³ The word-form itself is ancient, and due to the version of Dionysius Thrax’s work that has come down to us, but the following quotation will indicate why his usage is not useful in the present context: “A Dionym is a couple of names applied to the same proper noun, as Alexander and Paris, without there being any reciprocity in their signification; e.g. if one is Alexander, it does not follow that he is Paris. An Eponym (also called Dionym) is a noun which, along with another proper noun, is applied to one object, as Poseidón is called

I favour *dionym* partly because its priority has been (weakly) established, but also because it is phonologically more distinct than *aponym* from the partner term *eponym*. I propose therefore that *Namibia* is etymologically a *dionym* of its eponym *Namib*, and *Chelsea tractor* a *dionym* of its eponym *Chelsea*. Notice that, in general, a set of expressions will relate to one source name, which is therefore *the eponym*, whilst more than one term may be derived, and they will each therefore be *a dionym* of their source, and thus in all languages that formally encode a distinction between definite and indefinite expressions.⁴

Finally, recall that the ICOS Terminology Group's definition of *eponym* is "proper name of a person or group of persons, forming the basis of the name of another person, family, place, object etc." This encapsulates a proposal that the derived expression should itself be a [proper] name, which seems to me to be unduly restrictive. The examples involving *Chelsea* given above indicate that I am proposing that the new term *dionym* should also embrace lexical expressions that include the eponym. However, if it were thought desirable, a distinction could be drawn between *onymic dionyms* (dionyms that are proper names) and *lexical dionyms* (dionyms that are lexemes). The first of these is coherent, but its jarring morphophonology and apparent redundancy might tell against it.

Dionym: a lexical expression or proper name deriving from a proper name by simple replication, morphological derivation, or construction into a multi-lexeme expression; any such onym or lexicalized expression that includes a proper name. The proper name that is the basis of such an expression is its *eponym*. Eponymy and dionymy are two facets of an etymological process, *eponymy* being legitimative and *dionymy* creative.

Translation equivalents: this term should be straightforwardly adaptable into many other languages following existing models with Greek etymology, either used as an alternative to existing terms, or adopted as an embodiment of self-conscious internationalization.

2. *Nominabilia*: What may be named

From time to time, though certainly not often, a new class is added to the range of entity-classes within some culture that can bear individual proper names. Sometimes such a class is created by technological advances (the invention of ships, stagecoaches or railway locomotives), sometimes by

Enosichthon, and Apollo, Phœbos." (The sometimes problematic translation is that of Davidson (1874). See also Swiggers & Wouters (1998).) Thrax's *dionyma* is clearly understood as containing the prefix δι- *di-* 'two'.

⁴ Strandberg (2016: 105) uses the term *eponymization* to mean 'transfer of an existing toponym to denote another place as well'. This usage is interpretable in the post-classical way: it involves making an eponym out of the original place's name. The new name will be dionymic.

changes in human practices (the establishment of army regiments, sports clubs, shops and studios or business corporations), and sometimes by changes in the perceived nameability of members of an extant class (e.g. streets, houses, domestic animals). Cultural pressures of various sorts may come to favour the bestowing of proper names on at least some entities in that new class.

We do not have an internationally agreed general term for classes of entities which may conventionally bear names in some culture or cultures, though we have many taxonyms for individual classes: *anthroponym*, *theonym*, *toponym*, *hydronym*, *chrematonym*, and so on.⁵ What is nameable may in principle vary from culture to culture, and from epoch to epoch, though at least anthroponyms, and probably at least some categories of toponym (in a broad sense), appear to be universal.

For new terms the temptation is to head straight for the classical languages, as exemplified above with *dionym*. In English the term *nameables* has no currency (though it is used in more or less the way formalized here in some papers of my own, e.g. Coates 2014, 2016). *OED* contains the word *nameable*, but only as an adjective, and not in any sense directly useful for onomastics. As a term for the relevant entity-classes, we might consider *nominabilia* (etymologically a Modern Latin third-declension neuter plural nominalized adjective, following the model of *memorabilia*, which has been recorded in English since 1855 in its present sense and is now in widespread usage); thus human beings, lakes and streets are three classes of *nominabilia*, that is, classes of entity conventionally expected or permitted to bear individual proper names, in all European cultures. New classes of *nominabilia* may be added from time to time.

It might be thought that the lack of a specified singular form could be a problem. In principle it might exist (**nominabile*), but there should never be a need to refer to an individual entity as (a) nameable; it is the class of which it is a member which has the property of nameability. (*Cats are nominabilia; ?*my cat is a nameable/a nominabile.*) Whether an entity *sui generis* is in principle nameable is an ontological and epistemological crux. It strikes me that God in a monotheistic religion may have a name without belonging to any *class* of *nominabilia*, as may certain unique entities in fantasy literature from the biblical Leviathan to the Toho Co.'s Godzilla. (Unless disparate fantasy monsters themselves constitute a class!)

A further degree of subtlety may be necessary for new types of names

⁵ My thanks are due to two *Onoma* peer reviewers for pointing out that expressions substantially answering to my proposal have already been widely used in Slavic linguistics: a phrasal term that can be translated into English as *onymic object* (see for example Šrámek 1981) and a noun for the process of applying a name to a member of a different class of object, *transonymization*, the resultant expression being a *transonym* (*Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny*, kindly translated by one of the reviewers). An *onymic object* is any individual bearing a proper name, but also any individual capable of bearing one.

for entities that are already in a class of *nominabilia*, and which already actually bear names. Nicknames are one such type of very long standing. Over recent years the related concepts of *handle* ('username', on social media, e.g. Twitter; originally American slang and now in widespread usage) and *nick* (presumably backformed from *nickname*, 'self-attributed name' – Raátz 2011; see also Czopek-Kopciuch 2004) have emerged in the everyday practices of human-computer interaction and computer-mediated communication, and thence in onomastic literature. These are particular varieties of (human) pseudonym adopted for specific purposes involving computer use, web access and app use, and participants' social media and gaming identities. These imply the need for a subtler specification of naming types; *nominabilia* may possess *types* of name that are, at least in principle, functionally distinct. This is not news, of course; given names and surnames are also types of names for one class of *nominabilia*, namely human beings.

Nominabilia: (1) entities with common or similar characteristics perceived as forming a class, which are culturally required, expected or permitted to bear proper names; potentially name-bearing entities; (2) the classes of such entities themselves; (3) entities *sui generis* perceived as nameable despite being unclassified or unclassifiable.

Translation-equivalents: single-word equivalents are completely thinkable in a range of European languages, for example: *nameables*, *nommables*, *nombrables*, *Benennbare*, *névképesek*, *nimettävä*, *isimlendirilebilenler*, *именуемые*, *pojmenovatelná* (though the last would be more in line with typical usage if accompanied by a noun like *entity* 'entities' (fem.), and agreeing in gender accordingly with final *-né*).⁶

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Artur Gałkowski for discussion of the term *nominabilia*, to two anonymous *Onoma* reviewers for perceptive and constructive comments, and to friends and colleagues with whom I have discussed the translation of the proposed terms, but who may or may not choose to endorse my suggestions. They are not responsible for any errors that remain.

References

- Allan, Kathryn. 2008. *Metaphor and metonymy: A diachronic approach*. London: Philological Society.
 Beeching, Cyril Leslie. 1990. *A dictionary of eponyms*, third edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Respectively English, French, Spanish, German, Hungarian, Finnish, Turkish, Russian, Czech.

- Brink, Stefan. 2016. Transferred names and analogy in name-formation. In Hough, Carole (ed.), with Izdebska, Daria, *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*, 158–166. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coates, Richard. 2014. We are surrounded by onymies: Relations among names, name-types, and terminological categories. In Tort Donada, Joan & Montagut i Montagut, Montserrat (eds.), *Els noms en la vida quotidiana. Actes del XXIV Congrés Internacional de Ciències Onomàstiques (ICOS) / Names in daily life. Proceedings of the XXIV ICOS International Congress of Onomastic Sciences*, section 1, 6–13. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.
- Coates, Richard. 2016. Names and historical linguistics. In Hough, Carole (ed.), with Izdebska, Daria, *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*, 525–539. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cruse, Alan. 2011. *Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*, third edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, David. 2008. *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*, sixth edition. Chichester: Wiley.
- Czopek-Kopciuch, Barbara. 2004. Nick – nowa kategoria antroponimiczna? [Nick – A new anthroponymic category?]. In Michalewski, Kazimierz (ed.), *Współczesne odmiany języka narodowego* [Modern varieties of the national language], 106–111. Łódź: Oficyna Wydawnicza LEKSEM.
- Davidson, Thomas. 1874. The grammar of Dionysios Thrax. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 8 (4), 326–339. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/i25665887>) (Accessed 2021-08-04.)
- Dirven, René & Pörings, Ralf (eds.). 2002. *Metaphor and metonymy in comparison and contrast*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Freeman, Morton S. 1998. *A new dictionary of eponyms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grote, George. 1846–1856. *A history of Greece* (12 vols). London: John Murray.
- ICOS. 2019. List of key onomastic terms, English version. (<https://icosweb.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ICOS-Terms-en.pdf>) (Accessed 2022-09-07.)
- Malmkjær, Kirsten. 2010. *The Routledge linguistics encyclopedia*, third edition. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Matthews, P[eter] H. 2014. *The concise Oxford dictionary of linguistics*, third edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny* [New encyclopaedic dictionary of the Czech language], entries *onymický objekt* (<https://www.czechency.org/slovník/ONYMICK%C3%9D%20OBJEKT>) and *transonymizace* (<https://www.czechency.org/slovník/TRANSONYMIZACE>) (Accessed 2022-11-12.)
- Oxford English dictionary (OED)* online edition (subscription required). (<https://www.oed.com/>) (Accessed 2021-08-03.)

- Raátz, Judit. 2011. *Nick* as self-attributed name. *Nouvelle Revue d'Onomastique* 53, 183–209.
- Šrámek, Rudolf. 1981. Das onymische und das appellativische Objekt. In Rymut, Kazimierz (ed.), *Proceedings of the 13th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences*, vol. II, 503–511. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Stewart, George R. 1970. *A concise dictionary of American place-names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strandberg, Svante. 2016. River names. In Hough, Carole (ed.), with Izdebska, Daria, *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*, 104–114. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swiggers, Pierre & Wouters, Alfons. 1998. *De Tékhne grammatikē van Dionysius Thrax: de oudste spraakkunst in het Westen [Tékhne grammatikē by Dionysius Thrax: The oldest grammar in the West]*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Trask, R. L. 1993. *A dictionary of grammatical terms in linguistics*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Traugott, Elizabeth C. & Dasher, Richard B. 2001. *Regularity in semantic change*. (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 97.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, Thomas. 1553. *The arte of rhetorique for the vse of all soche as are studios of eloquence*. London: R. Grafton.