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Proper Names in English Humorous Discourse: at the Crossroads of Fundamental Theories and Entertainment

Elena F. Kosichenko ⓘ

National Research University «Moscow Power Engineering Institute», *Moscow, Russian Federation*
✉ KosichenkoYF@mpei.ru

Abstract. The aim is to reveal the role of personal names in creating comic effect in different types of humorous discourse. A special focus is placed on J.S. Mill's, A. Gardiner's, B. Russel's theories of proper names. Emphasis is also laid on the contribution of H. Spencer, Ch. Darwin, B. Jonson and W. Shakespeare to the development of the general theory of humour. The basic research methods are semiotic, linguo-stylistic and etymological analysis, data interpretation, website traffic analysis. Theoretical works by British philosophers, scientists and writers can be used as a methodological foundation for studying personal names in humorous discourse. Analysis of English onomastic jokes, puzzles, articles from British magazines and internet-memes proves the pervasive nature of onomastic humour in English. The author hypothesizes that the interest of the most outstanding British thinkers taken in personal names and humour are hardly accidental and can be explained by the uniqueness of British culture and national identity.

Keywords: British onomastics, English humour, onomastic jokes

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Имя собственное в англоязычном юмористическом дискурсе: на пересечении фундаментальных теорий и развлечений

Е.Ф. Косиченко 🆔

Национальный исследовательский университет «МЭИ», *Москва, Российская Федерация*
✉ KosichenkoYF@mpei.ru

Аннотация. Автор исследует роль имен собственных как средства создания комического эффекта в различных типах юмористического дискурса. Отмечается, что исторически ключевая роль в изучении как имен собственных, так и юмора принадлежит именно британским философам, ученым и писателям, подчеркивается роль ономастических теорий Дж.С. Милля, А. Гардинера и Б. Рассела, а также акцентируется вклад Т. Гоббса, Г. Спенсера, Ч. Дарвина, Б. Джонсона и У. Шекспира в создание и развитие общей теории юмора. В качестве основных исследовательских методов использовались методы семиотического, лингвостилистического и этимологического анализа, метод интерпретации полученных данных и анализ активности подписчиков и гостей сайтов. Фундаментальные труды британских исследователей в области ономастики и юмора могут составить основу междисциплинарных исследований имен собственных в юмористическом дискурсе. Анализ ономастических шуток, загадок, статей из британских журналов, видеосюжетов, интернет-мемов доказывает, что имена собственные являются важной частью британской культуры и неизбежным элементом юмористического дискурса. Выдвигается предположение, что интерес со стороны выдающихся умов Британии к проблемам имен собственных и юмора обусловлен особенностями британской культуры и британской национальной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: британская ономастика, имена собственные, английский юмор, ономастическая шутка

Introduction

The idea to consider different aspects of proper names in context of humorous discourse originated from the fact that both names and humour have been areas of philosophic interest and scientific discussions since Antiquity. Plato is known to be the first philosopher who differentiated between *correct/natural* names (related to reality and reflecting certain properties of things) and *conventional* names (those that do not tell the truth about things, are not reliable tools for achieving knowledge) [1], and thus laid the basis for long-term research in the field of nomination and cognition. The opportunity for people to be cognizant of things

through their names was further discussed by ancient and medieval scholars, and took a new turn in Peter Abelard's theory of conceptualism, which created the foundation for H. Joseph's theory of names and naming. In the 20th century, when onomastics developed into a science, there emerged two different approaches to the study of proper names, which are the logical one (grounded on the ideas of J.S. Mill who believed proper names to have no semantic content), and the religious one, rooted in works by Russian theologists (A.F. Losev, P. Florensky, S.N. Bulgakov) who regarded names as spiritual entities able to reflect people's nature and determine their fates. Today, onomastic research is rather empirical than philosophic with two main philological traditions, which are, the linguistic one, dealing with investigations into the history of names, the study of their etymology, and the literary one, looking into the role of proper names as text structural elements. However, the philosophical perspective of onomastic research is still a relevant issue.

The earliest philosophical research on humour is known to have been done by Aristotle who viewed comedy as something pleasant but useless, pointing out that people generally praise the company of those who can make a good joke. Besides sharing his observations on the positive effect of humour and laughter, Aristotle also considered the two main mechanisms that trigger good jokes, namely paradox (incongruity) and play on words (puns). Differentiating between irony and buffoonery, Aristotle considered irony to be a far more noble way of expressing oneself, he stressed that a nobleman jokes to amuse himself and the buffoon to amuse others [2]. Unlike Aristotle who believed that comedy might be inconsistent with a person's high status, the Roman statesman Cicero, emphasized the rhetorical power of humour and pointed out that wit was not only a supportive element of public speaking and the greatest glory of eloquence but one of man's greatest talents that came before good education [3]. The ancient historian Plutarch identified different kinds of humour, like ridicule which is usually directed against human vices, friendly jokes and self-irony which he regarded the least offensive form of humour. Stressing the importance of the aesthetic side of humor Plutarch wrote that anyone who wanted to be accepted by others should be careful while making jokes, otherwise it was worth refraining from ridicule [4].

During Enlightenment and Late Modern period in philosophy the problem of humour was addressed by many prominent scholars, mostly British and German. Addressing laughter, I. Kant defined it as something meaningless, an affect triggered by a sudden transformation of intense expectation into nothing, and therefore totally useless for the mind, but good for the body and soul, and even compared the effect a person received from laughter with the benefits of music. Interestingly, in his works I. Kant brought up quite a number of jokes and anecdotes that were popular with his contemporaries [5]. However, I. Kant's theory received certain criticism. For example, in the chapter "On the Theory of the Ridiculous" from his book "The World as Will and Representation" A. Schopenhauer disapproved of I. Kant's idea of laughter being transformation from intense expectation into nothing calling it inconsistent, as, to his

mind, there were always positive emotions caused by logical incompatibility. Willing to grasp the essence of humour, A. Schopenhauer argues that the source of the funny lies in the paradoxical and unexpected correlation of some particular object or phenomenon with a concept that is heterogeneous with it in other respects. Just like I. Kant, A. Schopenhauer brings up many examples of different kinds of humour in order to show the difference between foolish actions that happen accidentally and jokes that are always intentional and verbal. An important part of A. Schopenhauer's theory is his idea that being the opposite of light-heartedness, seriousness is based on awareness of complete consistency between a notion and reality, a serious person thinks he views things the way they are [6].

Summing up, it is worth saying that with all the contribution of German philosophers into humour research, it was British scholars who founded a general theory of humour and elaborated on it. Likewise, it was the British logician John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) who started the western tradition in onomastics, with German and American scholars to follow. Thus, in the next part of this paper we'll go on to describe the role of British philosophers and scientists in studying proper names and humorous discourse.

Theoretical framework
Great British onomasticians

Despite all the disputes about J.S. Mill's theory of proper names, hardly any onomastic research is done without reference to it. According to J.S. Mill, unlike general and collective names (common nouns), which are connotative, proper names only denote individuals and may awaken in our mind thoughts about them without indicating or implying any attributes as belonging to those individuals. Individuals' names are, thus, unmeaning marks that give us an opportunity to think about a person every time we see him/her or hear his/her name. Making this assumption J.S. Mill specifies that no matter how many people bear the name *John*, they do not show any common qualities [7]. Interestingly, in his understanding of what a name actually is J.S. Mill follows the ideas of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) who defined a name as a word that serves for a mark 'which may raise in our mind a thought like to some thought we had before, and which being pronounced to others, may be to them a sign of what thought the speaker had' [7. P. 29]. The striking point is that, being highly regarded for his political philosophy, T. Hobbes contributed a lot to the development of many sciences and was in fact the founder of the superiority theory of humour, which will be given due consideration in the next part of this paper.

Another great British philosopher known for his investigations in the field of names is Bertrand Russel (1872–1970) whose theory of descriptions is regarded as a breakthrough in the philosophy of language. Being a logician and a mathematician, B. Russel developed a logical approach to names and naming. It's important to mention that both his personal life and scientific career were influenced

by J.S. Mill, who was Russel's parents' friend. In his essay *Descriptions* B. Russel argued that names (simple symbols[1]) are different from descriptions — words that acquire their meanings in speech and that are generally called names by people. Considering the example of *Walter Scott* as the author of *Waverly*, B. Russel wrote, 'We have here a name, "Scott," and a description, "the author of Waverley," which are asserted to apply to the same person <…> Scott is a simple symbol, because, though it has parts (namely, separate letters), these parts are not symbols. On the other hand, "the author of Waverley" is not a simple symbol, because the separate words that compose the phrase are parts which are symbols' [8. P. 176]. All in all, according to B. Russel, proper names exist in our mind in form of knowledge about a person, this knowledge is actualized whenever a symbol is used in speech.

Another outstanding British philosopher, H.W.B. Joseph (1867–1943), studied proper names from the standpoint of the medieval disputes between nominalists and realists and with regard to P. Abelar's reconciling ideas of conceptualism which he actually shared. Believing J.S. Mill's views to have evolved from nominalism, H.W.B. Joseph following the ideas of conceptualism according to which individuals cannot be the same by their nature, however some concepts may be shared by a number of individuals, thus making them similar in a way. H. Joseph wrote '<…> men and horses are instances of their kinds; and individual men or horses are so much more obviously different from one another <…> that we cannot overlook in them the distinction between the manifold individuals and the one common nature' [9. P. 31–32]. Thus, in H.W.B. Joseph's philosophy names communicate general ideas as in most cases we recognize by the way they sound what objects they apply to. In fact, in different languages names can provide information about gender, nationality and even social status or age.

Reflecting on the influence of J.S. Mill's onomastic views it is highly important to contemplate the theory of proper names developed by Alan Gardiner (1879–1963) whose widely known writing *The Theory of Proper Names*: *a Controversial Essay* reveals, as the title suggests, how dubious the nature of these linguistic units is. It needs to be stressed that, although A. Gardiner relies on J.S. Mill's views, his theory is rather linguistic than philosophical as he takes into account the etymological aspect of proper names as well as the grammatical meanings of singularity/ plurality and (in) definiteness they acquire when functioning as common names or homonyms. The core of A. Gardiner's theory of names is their division into 'embodied' and 'disembodied' with elements of the first class referring to concrete individuals and those of the second class having no particular referent (approaching common names), or having many different referents (being homonyms).

In his essay A. Gardiner writes that there have been literally thousands of persons called *Mary* or *John*, and even place-names display a certain amount of repetition.

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[1] Proper names without any connection with concrete people.

He writes, 'The multitude of persons and places for which proper names have to be found is so great that the same names must inevitably occur again and again', and stresses 'when the etymologist focuses attention on the name Mary, it is evident that this name is completely disembodied; Mary is, as it were, the essence extracted from a vast assemblage of embodied Marys.'. Considering another example A. Gardiner explains '<…> my John is tall, dark, and differs markedly in character and ability, not to speak of age, from my neighbour's small and fair-haired John. The two names John have, accordingly, a different sense, but the same sound' [10]. Thus, the example of the name *Mary* proves that in terms of etymology this name is purely disembodied whereas each concrete Mary bears an embodied name. The example of the name *John* shows that, without reference to a concrete person the name is disembodied, and the words that mark all people with the same names are homonyms.

To sum up, it is worth indicating that proper names were a matter of deep interest to British philosophers and scientists of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Philosophical ideas of J.S. Mill started a logical approach in onomastics with B. Russel, H.W.B. Joseph, A. Gardener to develop it. In the 20th century the views of British philosophers were developed by American, German and Dutch scientists S. Kripke, R. Carnap, L. Wittgenstein, O. Jespersen, etc.

Great British humour researchers

As mentioned above, the founder of the general theory of humour was the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), whose scientific and philosophical ideas were further developed by other great British philosophers. Long-term observations allowed T. Hobbes to come to the conclusion that what distinguishes people from other living creatures is a passionate love for something that causes certain typical reactions, like facial changes (distortion of the countenance), body movements and sounds, accompanied by a feeling of joy and triumph. From T. Hobbes' point of view, wit and jokes are not the only reasons for people to laugh, since people can also laugh at failures of others (mischances) or indecencies that are neither funny nor witty. He notes that laughter is sometimes caused by other people's shortcomings or absurd behavior, as well as by their own actions, although, from his experience people rarely laugh when they themselves or their friends are mocked at. Pointing out that people hardly ever laugh at stale jokes, T. Hobbes stresses that what moves laughter has to be new and unexpected, and give a person the opportunity feel glory over others. Thus, T. Hobbe's key idea is that the desire to laugh appears from sudden realization of one's superiority over someone or over one's earlier foolishness, unless the latter is associated with shame. T. Hobbes writes, '<…> the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonor' [11]. To add to this, T. Hobbes distinguishes two types of wit, namely natural and acquired wit,

and opposes natural wit to what he calls dullness (slow imagination or fault of the mind). His point is that natural wit comes from personal experience and, unlike acquired wit (the result of learning how to use language correctly) does not need any method, culture or instruction.

About two hundred years later, different aspects of humour occupied the mind of the English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) who created a comprehensive Incongruity theory of laughter. According to H. Spencer people laugh as a result of unusual sensations (physiological aspect) and pleasure (psychological aspect) they experience when someone finds themselves in a disadvantageous position. H. Spencer pays special attention to the physiology of humor, emphasizing the beneficial effects of muscular movements, such as clapping, rubbing hands, hitting the knees, and so on. In his essay *On the Psychology of Laughter* the philosopher wonders why we smile when a child puts on a man's hat, or laugh at the corpulent Gibbon who was unable to rise from his knees after making a proposal. Answering these questions, H. Spencer suggests that what causes laughter is our understanding of the absurdity of both situations and the feeling of pleasure or vivacity that results from perception of incongruity. Considering T. Hobbes' ideas, H. Spencer doubts the part of the Superiority theory that claims that laughter is caused by a feeling of pleasure arising from a growing self-respect at the sight of other people's humiliation, and argues that 'there are various humiliations to others which produce in us anything but laughter' [12. P. 395]. As an argument H. Spencer gives an example of a good pun, laughter over which is in no way connected with self-esteem, but is the result of a person's ability to comprehend the contrast, the inconsistency of a situation with reality. Emphasis on the absurdity factor that causes laughter explains why H. Spencer's theory of humour is known as the Incongruity theory. In addition to the fact that H. Spencer thoroughly explores the psychological and intellectual sides of humour, he also comments on the physiology of laughter. He argues that involuntary muscular motions appear whenever special nerves raised to the state of tension discharge themselves on special muscles. Comparing the reflex reactions that accompany laughter with nervous excitation of other nature, like a feeling of cold or taste sensations, H. Spencer suggests that reactions to some comic story are more complex as they occur as a result of intellectual and emotional activity. On the other hand, laughter is akin to tears or manifestations of anger as they also provide an emotional outlet [12]. Summing up, it seems important to stress that both T. Hobbes' Superiority theory and H. Spencer's Incongruity theory have contributed a lot to the creation of the general theory of humour.

H. Spencer's interest in the physiology of laughter is by no means accidental as one of his greatest contemporaries was Charles Darwin (1809–1882) who also gave due consideration to different aspects of laughter and humour and offered a scientific explanation of laughter as a form of relaxation and an emotional outlet. Ch. Darwin defines laughter as a way of manifestation happiness and joy that is accompanied by various purposeless movements, like dancing about, clapping hands or stamping.

To illustrate that laughter is an inborn human ability Ch. Darwin brings up examples of people who couldn't due to their blindness or deafness, have acquired any expression through imitation, yet when a letter from a beloved friend was commented to one deaf and blind woman, she 'laughed and clapped her hands, and the colour mounted to her cheeks'. Ch. Darwin also argues that reasons for laughter vary due to different conditions, like age or mental health, which is why adults and children, healthy and not healthy people laugh in different ways. The important point is that laughter is always connected with something unexpected that causes glory and fortune, however, this should be some kind of momentary happiness, as no poor man would laugh or smile on suddenly hearing that a large fortune has been bequeathed to him. Interestingly, Ch. Darwin also considers the cultural aspect of laughter. Although he admits that people's ability to laugh is universal and all people express good spirit in a recognizable way, he also describes numerous cultural differences in laughing people's behaviour, evidence of which he received from his, so-called informants. Thus, savages sometimes express their satisfaction not only by smiling, but by gestures derived from the pleasure of eating, namely, by rubbing their bellies and Greenlanders, suck down air with a certain sound [13. P. 801–819].

Talking about the role of British thinkers in the development of the general theory of humour, it is necessary to refer to Benjamin Johnson (1572–1637) and Willian Shakespear (1564–1616), both known as theorists of humour. According to different research it was B. Johnson who developed the theory of four humours, which are related to four tempers, and founded the genre of city comedy, also known as citizen comedy, which is 'characterized by its contemporary urban subject-matter and its portrayal, often satirical, of middle-class life and manners'. Plots of B. Johnson's comedies are based on his personal observations on Englishmen's habit and the joy they get from everything unusual, queer, weird and odd [14]. W. Shakespeare's humour is rather stylistic, and comes from a lot of subtle jokes and witticisms based on puns, which makes him the master of maxims[2].

A survey of historically most important theoretical investigations into onomastics and humour undertaken by British philosophers, scientists and writers proves that they can create a methodological foundation for further analysis of personal names in humorous discourse.

Data analysis and findings
Onomastic puzzles and jokes in everyday discourse

Like onomasticons of other languages, British onomasticon is quite heterogeneous and consists of names of different types: first (personal / given) names, surnames (family names), second (Christian) names, nicknames, etc.

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[2] Shakespear's Humour. http://www.w-shakespeare.ru/library/moy-shekspir-gumanisticheskie-temi-v-tvorchestve-shekspira5.html (accessed: 23.08.2023). (In Russ.).

Personal names came historically first and were all derived from common names (appellatives), thus, etymologically they are all linked to positively connoted words and are used to ascribe certain virtues to their bearers. Old English names, also known as Anglo-Saxon names, were quite a many, however most of them disappeared giving way to French and Biblical names. Among Germanic names that survive to the present days are *Alfred, Edgar, Edmund, Ethelbert, Hilda*; some Old English first names remain as elements of surnames, like *Go (o) dwin*, *Irwin*, *Baldwin Oswald, Osmond, Osgood, Bobb, Dodd, Hudd* [3]. As a result of the Norman Conquest French names (*Hugo, Ralf, Richard, Robert, Roger, William*) and biblical names (*Adam, Eve, Benjamin, Joseph, Jacob, David, Rebecca, Ruth*) became popular. The rest of the British onomasticon consists of names that arrived from literature and pop art (*Rosalind, Olivia, Portia, Juliet, Cordelia Pamela, Clarissa, Leila*), names of precious stones flowers and positive emotions (*Beryl*, *Ruby, Benifacio, Daisy, Flora, Iris, Lilac, Lily, Pansy, Poppy, Rose, Jasmine, Joy*). Some female names were derived from male names (*Joan*, *Jane*, *Janet*, *Petra*, *Paula*, *Georgina*). In the 11th century, due to population registration a tradition of giving surnames was started. Most English surnames were derived from the names of locations, professions, first names, nicknames or were borrowed from other languages [15–17].

Today, people's first and family names are their most important identities, which is why in all societies there are numerous naming rituals, traditions and practices that vary between sacred and entertaining. British English is known for a large number of onomastic puzzles and jokes[4], like the ones given below where each personal name is homonymous to some word it is in no way connected with etymologically. This palay on words produces an amusing effect and makes jokes of this kind popular with children. The examples below show that people tend to associate names with some unrelated common nouns, whereas in fact they were historically derived from different appellatives[5].

What was the name of the Mexican that lost his car? Carlos. (*Carlos* from Old High German *Karl* 'manly'; sounds like *car loss*).

What do you call a woman who works with cats? Kitty. (*Kitty* from Latin *Catharina* 'pure'; sounds like *kitty* — the diminutive form of *cat*).

What do you call a man with a legal document on his head? Will. (*Will* — diminutive from Old High German *William* 'will power'; sounds like *will* 'a legal document').

What do you call a boy with his hair cut at shoulder length? Bob. (Bob from Old High German *Robert* 'glory and bright'; sounds like *bob* 'a special hairstyle')

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[3] The New Encyclopedia Britannica in 32 vol., 1994. Vol. 24. P. 736.
[4] 'Top 129 Funny Baby Names for Girls & Boys' URL: https://www.boredpanda.com/name-jokes/ (accessed 18.03.2024).
[5] Etymological meanings [15].

What do you call a guy who loves exercising? — Jim. (Jim — diminutive from *James*, comes from Hebrew *Jacob* 'the follower'; sounds like *gym* 'a place to exercise').

What do you call a man stuffed in a mailbox? — Bill. (*Bill* — diminutive from Old High German *William* 'will power'; sounds like *bill* 'a financial document').

It is important to emphasize that historically none of these first names are related to the words they are associated with by native speakers, the humorous effect in these jokes and other examples of this kind results from a play on words which causes the effect of incongruity.

In British English there are also quite a number of surnames that due to associations with some common names produce the effect of absurdity and may sound funny. Among the names that seem ridiculous to the British are *Nutter* and *Smellie*6. *Originating from Yorkshire and Lancashire the family name Nutter* used to have the forms *Notere* (with the meaning 'the one who makes notes') and *Nothard* (with the meaning 'shepherd'), thus in both cases the family name is connected with an occupation. The Scottish family name *Smellie* comes from the word *smile*. With the etymology being generally unknown to common native speakers the two names are associated with the words *nutter* ('a crazy man') and *smelly* ('the one who smells bad'), respectively.

British first and family names so often become themes for jokes that the national news tabloid *The Daily Mail* frequently refers to the topic[7] Among the surnames often laughed at are *Drunkard*, *Swetinbedde*, *Crakpot*, *Bottom*, *Jelly*, *Pigg*, *Cock* and many others whose etymology is long forgotten and the newly established associations create humorous effect. The, so-called, unfortunate surnames often appear in wedding announcements with the funniest part of it being that the surnames of groom and bride mismatch and sound hilarious when put together. On the list are such combinations as[8] *Bush–Shaver* (sounds like the one who shaves bushes), *Burn–Butts* (sounds like burning female backside), *MacDonald–Berger* (sound like a burger from McDonalds), *Wang–Holder* (sounds like the one who holds penis), *Crapp–Beer* (sounds like terrible beer), *Cockman–Dickman* (both cock and dick are colloquial for penis), *Stolen–*

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[6] URL: https://greatbritishmag.co.uk/uk-culture/seven-funniest-surnames-uk-that-exist/ (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[7] URL: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/fe-mail: /article-2401710/New-book-reveals-UKs-bizarre-surnames.html (accessed: 15.12.2023); URL: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-402920/Smellies-Bottoms-named-surname-list-shame.html (accessed: 15.12.2023); URL: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/fe-mail: /article-4040794/Are-worst-couple-names-Shaver-Nicely-Long-Wiwi-unions-guaranteed-make-cringe.html (accessed: 15.12.2023); URL: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2150705/Jaeger-Meister-Rather-Grim-Partee-Moore-Hilarious-wedding-announcements-couples-unfortunate-surnames.html (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[8] The comments in brackets make the humorous part more explicit.

Ford (sound like a stolen car), *House–Reckker* (sound like the one who wrecks houses), etc.

Before going over to another kind of discourse let us emphasize that onomastic jokes and puzzles are made by the British on a daily basis, which is proved by references to different resources, like children' websites and tabloids.

Funny naming trends in journalistic discourse

When reviewing different hilarious names and naming traditions it seems worthwhile to emphasize the role of journalistic discourse in creating and promoting naming trends. This part of research contains a survey of a number of news articles on the constantly changing fashions in naming and most surprising naming trends of the current century.

British news websites that publish information about the recent and the incoming trends are numerous. In 2023 the variety of unusual first names turned out to be great, with the most popular being maximalist names that are long and have grand meanings (*Ceridwen* 'poetry', *Eulalia* 'well spoken', *Beauregard* 'a beautiful view', ALDEMAR 'noble or nobleman') and vintage names and their diminutives (*Howard/Howie*, *Christopher/Kit*, *Samantha/Sam*, *Samuel/Sam*, *Winifred/Winne*). According to one BBC article[9] the main reason for the number of maximalist names to be gradually rising is the willingness of parents all across the world to give their child a unique name that will charge the offspring for success. In the Net there are also recommendations on how not to name a baby so that the name was original. Interestingly, parents are warned against consulting A-Z baby name books, as well as choosing fast fashion names, like *Jax, Harper*, *Summer*, *Hunter*, or traditional names with different spellings, like *Wynter* or *Emileig*[10].

British news websites also provide information about bans on names. For example, the BBC video programme[11] *What can't you name your baby?* gives a brief coverage of naming restrictions in a number of countries, claiming that Great Britain is a more flexible country in terms of baby-naming rules than many others as in Britain parents are only forbidden from using offensive words and numerals for baby names but are absolutely free to give their children names like *Royalty*, *Fox*, *Diesel*, *Flourish*, *Mars*[12]. *The video appeared in 2017 and within one year received 33 thousand views and 163 comments from subscribers, some of whom insist that parents should be allowed to choose for their babies any*

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[9] URL: https://politicallybrewed.com/why-uncommon-baby-names-are-surging-bbc/ (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[10] URL: https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/20682650/baby-names-set-to-be-huge-for-2023/ (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[11] URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FG_9L375DqM (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[12] More information on the issue is given in this article from The Sun URL: https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/4840969/illegal-baby-names-uk-banned/ (accessed: 15.12.2023).

names they like, with others expressing the opposite opinion. There are also some examples of weird names from the viewers[13].

> I'd move the kid elsewhere if I am restricted to name it what I want, silly world, a name is a name.
> Tbh, don't name your kids weird names, they're the one who's going to suffer the humiliation throughout their lives.
> My grandfather knew a boy whose name was Egavas Savage. Egavas. You know, the old trick of just spelling the surname backwards. Works a charm.
> I met a woman named Stuff. And another named YaHighness.
> Some kid got laughed at by being named "Abcde"

Many articles on the subject of uncommon names focus on the negative impact names may have on people's lives. For instance, the article *Name and Shame*[14] from *The Sun* contains a list of most unusual names that careless parents chose for their children causing them a lot of embarrassment during their lives. Another article contains information about words people think would make good baby names if only they had different meanings. The list includes names, like *Malaria*, *Calorie*, *Insomnia*, *Violence*[15]. *The article is accompanied by a video whose presenter laughs her head off while reading these names and subscribers' comments. Britain's most popular newspaper Metro came up with an article*[16] that contains information about 19 people whose 'inappropriate' names affected their lives in a predictable way.

All in all, British top news publishers choose the topic of funny names and onomastic trends which gives reason to hypothesize that this topic is attractive for readers.

Names in humorous cultural discourse

Cultural discourse is here defined as a system of communication practices, acts, events and styles which are composed of specific symbols, symbolic forms, norms and their meanings [18]. Following the goal of the undertaken study, in this part we intend to consider British outstanding names *Queen Elizabeth II*, *James Bond* and *Harry Potter* in context of humorous discourse and with regard to typically British concepts *royalty*, *style* and *humour*.

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[13] All comments are quoted the way they are, without any corrections.
[14] URL: https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9719282/hilarious-names-real-people-dick-braine-ukip/ (accessed: 15.12.2023).
[15] URL: Name Games https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9719282/hilarious-names-real-people-dick-braine-ukip/
[16] URL: https://metro.co.uk/2014/12/09/19-people-with-inappropriately-hilarious-names-4980288/ (accessed: 15.12.2023).

The British Royal family is world-renowned for their good sense of humour with the late Queen Elizabet II having been praised a lot for her positive outlook and sparkling jokes. General appreciation of the Queen's wittiness is proved by the 1.6 million views,18 thousand likes and 1300 comments that the programme "Queen Elizabeth II's Funniest Moments"[17] received after the Monarch's death. One of the funniest jokes the Queen ever played was the part of James Bond girl she performed at the opening of the 2012 Olympic games (see figure 1). Later the Queen confessed that she had kept her plans to participate in the skit with Damiel Craig secret from everyone, including her family[18].

When I. Fleming's first novel about 007 Agent was published in 1953, James Bond almost immediately became a national hero and a recognizable symbol of the UK. Apart from 27 movies about J. Bond, there are a great number of advertisements, popular quotes and internet-memes that replicate the idea of a superhero and British style in a humorous way. Bond's image is easily identifiable due to some distinguishing features, like black shoes and perfect fitting suits, a gun and a poker face; despite a number of disagreeable habits (he is a drinker, a smoker and a lady-killer) he is an excellent example of Britishness (see figure 2).

Another symbol of the UK is Harry Potter and other characters of J.K. Rowling's series of books where a world of wizards and witches is described with regard to typically British realities, like public schools, sports, family values and relations. The book characters so much fascinated the British that on growing up and becoming parents Harry Potter's admirers started giving corresponding names to their children. In 2023 The daily Mirror published an article[19] that contains a story of a girl whose parents named her after a character from J. Rowling's books. There are also websites with stories of children whose parents gave them the names *Albus*, *Hermione*, *Ariana*, *Draco*, etc.[20]

The images of Harry Potter and other characters are widely replicated and serve the basis for various internet-memes, including some with the members of the royal family. The first two pictures below depict Prince Harry. Being ginger and troublesome. Prince Harry reminds Harry Potter's best friends, the Weasley brothers, and often becomes a character of internet memes (see figures 3). Not only the prince's looks and behaviour but also his name invites a lot of humorous variations, like the one in the meme with Lord Voldemort, the main villain of the book (see figure 4). Ironically, King Charles III (Prince Charles) and the rest of the

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royal family are also often portrayed as Harry Potter characters or are compared with them (see figure 5). There is also a popular internet meme depicting the British actress Imelda Staunton in the part of Queen Elizabeth II (the film The Crown) and the part of Dolores Umbridge (the film Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows), the similarity between the two images is striking (see figure 6).

The fact that the Internet is full of memes that present Britin's cultural values, like *royalty* and *style*, and Britin's cultural symbols, like the *names* of the Royal family members or most beloved fictitious characters in a comical and even ironical way, proves that British cultural discourse is essentially humourous with *a sense of humour* being another cultural value.

Fig. 1. James Bond girl

Fig. 2. An example of Britishness

Fig. 3. Prince Harry as a Weasley brother

Fig. 4. Royal names are also replicated

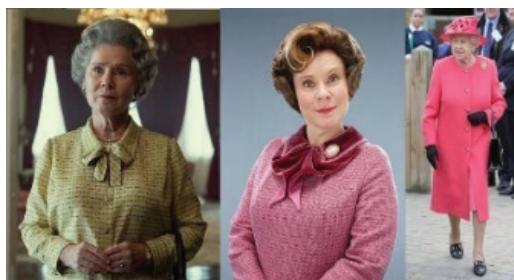**Fig. 5.** King Charles and Dobby, a male house-elf

Fig. 6. Imelda Staunton: between the late Queen and a Harry Potter character

Results and final remarks

The undertaken research into the British humorous discourse has proved that people's names are its important part, as Brits laugh both at common (personal and family names) and symbolic names. The ability to laugh at embarrassing, clumsy and awkward situations makes the British different from the rest of the world. Supposedly, it is the specific world-perception that explains the fact that British philosophers contributed greatly to the creation of the general theory of humour. Today, the British praise themselves a lot on their sense of humour believing that it runs in their veins and prevents them from taking the world around seriously.

The fact that British scholars took deep interest in onomastic issues and founded a logical paradigm in the philosophy of name is hardly accidental as not only natural, but also exact and social sciences prospered in Britain between the 17th and the 20th centuries creating favourable conditions for studying the principles of nomination. Besides, etymologically, the British onomasticon is quite heterogeneous and consists of names that came from different languages, which is another reason for names to seem an issue of scientific and human interest. Besides, being attracted by everything weird and eccentric the British appreciate experiments, including those with names which is another reason for them to be concerned with trends in the naming sphere. In conclusion, it has to be pointed out that the subject of names in humorous discourse is by no means exhausted as there are a whole number of issues that have not been considered in this research, like personal and cultural names in British political discourse and narrative discourse, both of which are basically ironical.

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Information about the author:

Elena F. Kosichenko, Dr.Sc. (Philology), Associate Professor, Department of Advertising, Public Relations and Linguistics, National Research University «Moscow Power Engineering Institute» (14, b.1, Krasnokazarmennaya str., Moscow, Russian Federation, 111250); *Research interests*: onomastics, linguo-semiotics, fiction, speech genres, media text, humorous discourse, theory and methods of teaching foreign languages; *e-mail*: ekosichenko@gmail.com KosichenkoYF@mpei.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-7613-9744; Author ID 589959; SPIN-code: 6010-5223; ResearcherID: HKW-0823-2023.

Сведения об авторе:

Косиченко Елена Федоровна, доктор филологических наук, доцент, профессор кафедры рекламы, связей с общественностью и лингвистики гуманитарно-прикладного института, Национальный исследовательский университет «Московский энергетический институт» (111250, Российская Федерация, г. Москва, ул. Красноказарменная, д. 14, стр. 1); *сфера научных интересов*: ономастика, лингвосемиотика, художественный текст, речевые жанры, медийный текст, юмористический дискурс, теория и методика преподавания иностранных языков; *e-mail*: ekosichenko@gmail.com KosichenkoYF@mpei.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-7613-9744; Author ID 589959; SPIN-код: 6010-5223; ResearcherID: HKW-0823-2023.