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Linguistic representation of allusions in modern British fiction

Языковая репрезентация аллюзий в современной Британской литературе

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Summary. The paper presents results of a study of ways of representing allusions to proper names in English. Analysis of a vast corpus of data obtained from modern British fiction has shown that the most common way to represent an allusion is to use a proper name in various linguistic contexts; a less frequent way is to use an adjective derived from the proper name; and a very rare phenomenon is the formation of a verb by conversion.

Key Words: allusion, linguistic representation, context, modern fiction

Аннотация. В статье представлены результаты исследования, направленного на изучение языковой репрезентации аллюзий в современной британской литературе. Анализ обширного материала, полученного из современной художественной литературы Великобритании, позволил установить основные типы включения аллюзий в текст: использование аллюзивного имени в разнообразных контекстах, образование отыменных прилагательных и значительно реже, образование глаголов от исходного имени собственного путем конверсии.

Ключевые слова: аллюзия, языковая репрезентация, контекст, современная художественная литература

Allusions are often seen as references to names of famous people and popular fictional characters as well as well-known facts, historical events and places 'in order to conjure up some extra meaning, embodying some quality or characteristic for which the word has come to stand' (5, p.vii). Unlike straightforward (literal) use of proper names, allusions refer to proper names in a non-literal sense, creating an image by transferring a quality typical of one (famous) person to somebody else , either fictional or real. Various classifications of allusions to proper names have been made according to their origin, the main sources being the Bible, Greek and Roman mythology, classical authors like Shakespeare and Dickens.

Allusions can be regarded, along with quotations, as powerful tools of forming intertextual relationships between various literary works of fiction, thus creating a continuum of cultural events and values. Allusions fulfil numerous functions in literary texts: description of characters and their moral and cultural values, expression of humorous, ironic, or even sarcastic attitudes (1, p.338; 7, p.365) or positive / negative assessment (often hyperbolic) of appearance and behavior of people (1, p.341; 2, p. 62 )

The use of allusions in literary texts, both poetic and prosaic, has not been the same throughout the history of English literature. One of the highest peaks in development of allusion as a stylistic device is often associated with the poetic art of John Milton and Alexander Pope, whose literary style is called “allusive” (4, p.69). Romantic poets and realistic novelists of the 19th century are known to have employed this stylistic device to great effect, but it was only with the advent of post-modernist literature that the use of allusion as a variety of intertext has become prominent again.

It should be mentioned that linguistic study of allusion is a relatively new approach, in contrast with the literary approach that has been developing for a long time. We may briefly characterize the linguistic way of investigating allusions as one involving the study both of forms of expressing allusive meanings and the functions the allusions have in text. However, extensive research has been successfully conducted demonstrating the role of allusions in literature. For example, it has been found that allusions to classical authors, like Charles Dickens, are widely used by modern writers (6, p.34), providing a bridge between the cultural past and present. On the other hand, significant steps have been made in studying types of allusions in the texts of particular authors, for example, John Fowles (8, p.134; 3,p. 220).The mechanics of allusion is based on the metaphorical transfer of a certain quality, the allusive feature or characteristic, from the original person whose name has become allusive, to another person or fictional character. According to current research, allusive names may contain several allusive features, the realization of a particular one depending on context (situation) (6, p.33).

In this paper we have attempted to approach the problem of linguistic representation of proper names used as allusions in modern British fiction. Texts of over thirty contemporary British novels have been studied for the use of allusive proper names. As a result, a corpus containing 623 instances of allusive precedent names was collected and analyzed from the point of view of types of contextual representation. The initial assumption was that allusive names will be functioning not only in the form of original nouns, but also in the form of derivatives – adjectives and verbs.

Linguistic analysis of the data has shown that allusive units containing proper names may be divided into two major groups: one-name allusive units and two- name allusive units. The first category is the prevalent one. The unit may consist of a proper name only, e.g., Venus, or a name preceded by an epithet, or a noun phrase, King Lear, Pandora’s box, Achilles’ heel, the labours of Hercules, etc. The other type of allusive unit contains two names closely connected in precedent text, e.g. Romeo and Juliet, Scilla and Charybdis, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The second largest group of allusions in the material analyzed is represented by adjectives derived from proper names. Among these adjectives, two types are found: words already existing in the English language (Dickensian, etc) and neologistic words formed by the author of the text (Hogwarts-style, etc). The third group of allusions is the smallest and is comprised of neologistic verbs formed by the authors for special context by proper name conversion ( to Gina-Ford). Let us have a look at how proper names of various structures are represented in literary contexts.

1.Allusions Represented by Proper Names

1.1 Allusions Represented by One- Proper-Name Phrases

Allusive proper names are often found in literary texts in comparative or metaphoric structures. There are two main ways of expressing the idea of comparison. Explicit comparative phrases use some linguistic marker of comparison: like, as, as…as. Implicit comparative phrases make use of verbs meaning “to evoke the image of somebody” (to remind, to recall, to reminisce, etc.) or those meaning “to be/look like somebody”. Let us first consider the explicit type of allusions based on comparison. In Example 1 we can see an allusion to the appearance of Harry Potter, a fictional character from the books by J.K.Rowlings, whose fame has greatly increased after the release of successful film adaptation. Harry’s face is familiar practically to everyone, which makes it sufficient for the writer just to allude to his name: visual recognition is immediate and the transfer of the boy’s image to the character described is almost simultaneous. Example 1: The junior registrar…looked like **Harry Potter**. Jackson didn’t really want to be treated by a doctor who looked like **Harry Potter** but he wasn’t in apposition to argue. ‘You seem to have taken a bit of a dunt to the head,’ wizard-boy said (Atkinson (2), p.235) It remains unsolved whether the allusion to Harry Potter in this case is to the original literary character or to the hero of the film. One can suggest the double nature of this type of allusion, which makes it similar to allusions to well-known works of painting, as is demonstrated by the Example 2. Here we find a comparative structure consisting of the name of the artist (Holbein) and the character of his painting (Christ). The indication of the name is essential for the reader familiar with the painting to be able to transfer the visual image of the dead Christ onto the figure of the injured worker. If somebody has never seen the painting or at least its reproduction but wants to understand the full meaning of the description, they should look it up and/or probably get some more information about this picture. Example 2: the man who fell from the ladder, Jean Block, is not fit to work and Jean-Baptiste visits him in his tent, where he lies on his bed of straw like **Holbein’s Christ** (Miller, p.142)

In our material there are a great many examples of allusions to actors and titles of films based on famous books. In Example 3the visual screen image is clear and the character in question (Mary Poppins) is metonymically represented by the actress playing its part. Example 3: She looked like **Julie Andrews in *Mary Poppins***, but about three stones heavier (Noble, p.401)

Often the allusion to the proper name is accompanied by a commentary in the form of an epithet introduced by the conjunction ‘but’. The resulting image may be neutral (Example 5) or contain a trace of irony, as in the Example 4, or even sarcasm, as in Example 6. Example 4: He reminded her a little of **King Kong**, but less friendly(Atkinson (1), p.309); Example 5: …she, dressed in a full-skirted, all-enveloping black dress and cap, the image of the recently deceased **Queen Victoria** in her widowhood…(Lodge, p.165); Example 6: ‘There’s Tabitha Coombs over by the archway through to the other room, the tallish one who looks like **Cher** on a bad day’ he added ( Ashley, p.10)

Sometimes the name of the character alluded to in the comparative phrase is substituted by a generic noun with an indefinite article (a girl, a novel) or a pronoun (someone) followed by the name of the author, or the title of the book. Example 7 : I was afraid to move, or even look around, like someone from an **Edgar** **Allen Poe** story (Butland, p.141); Example 8 : The journey back was uncomplicated and straight out of a **Daphne du** **Maurier** novel (Swan, p.221); Example 9: she adds in a silly voice to sound like an **Enyd Blyton** character( Brown, p.252); Example 10: She looked like a girl in a painting by **Vermeer**: as if she were constructed entirely of light (Bradley, 122); Example 11: I looked at Rob’s face and realized the longer I left it the more he was going to think I’d found something fully spectacular, like a lost notebook from Brunelleschi with a letter from Leonardo da Vinci inside, as though we were actually characters in ***Possession***(Butland,p.100). In the examples given above, allusions are made not to a particular character but to the style of an author. In the example 11 the name of the famous modern novelist, author of *Possession,* A.S.Byatt, is not mentioned, but the well-informed reader has no difficulty recognizing the atmosphere of suspense in which the two main characters, scholars of literature, find themselves in their quest for documents which could reveal something about the life of a famous poet of the 19th century.

Names of popular actors and other celebrities whose faces are well known to large audiences are often used as allusions, as can be illustrated by example 12 in which a prominent feature of the actress’s face is alluded to. Example 12 : Helen was about twenty and shockingly beautiful, with huge eyes, perfect blonde hair brushing her bottom and an **Angelina Jolie** mouth (Llewellyn, p.265). The proper name is used as a visual-image epithet which can be easily read by anyone familiar with the actress.

Quite frequently we encounter allusive names functioning as subjects in attributive (comparative) clauses with predicates in subjunctive mood. Such unreal comparisons add a picturesque dimension or a humorous vein to the description. Example 13: Martin had seen the funfair at night when the lights and smells and shouting were a dystopian vision that **Bosch** would have enjoyed painting (Atkinson(1), p.36); Example 14: Another well-timed pause for a smile. It stretched the edges of his face**, the** **Cheshire Cat** would have struggled in a contest with Chief Inspector Sutherland (Atkinson (1), p.336).

Another wide-spread way of representing an allusion is metaphorical re-naming (antonomasia), i.e., a transfer of an allusive proper name to another person. In most cases the allusive name is part of the nominal predicate with the verb “to be”. From the examples given below it can be seen that there are various types of re-naming representation:1)proper name in the function of direct appellation, used jocosely, presupposing the speaker being the other one in a pair (Juliet in the following example). Example 15: Yeah right, **Romeo**. Just try me (Raisin, 3); 2) proper name in a predicative structure.Example 16 : Carrie swallowed, instantly stricken with remorse as she saw two swollen tears slide silently and defiantly down Suzy’s reddened cheeks. Suzy never cried. She was **Boudicca**, her warrior friend (Swan, p.343); 3) proper name with an indefinite (descriptive) article (+ epithet): Example 17: ‘I hear from Fiona that he’s a total **Scrooge** and won’t pay his bills until the last moment’ (Binchy, p.220); Example 18 : ‘He had the mind of a **Hegel**, the historical sense of a Napoleon’ (Bradbury, p.157); 4) proper name used as a nickname (name of person followed by the definite article + allusive proper name ). Example 19: ‘Oh, trust him to find someone else the moment I leave him out of my sight!’ Lizzie said, with a laugh of pride in the notion of Muttie the **Lothario** (Binchie, p.336); 5) proper name used to describe a person as belonging to a certain type( with an indefinite article). Example 20 : He’s a **lothario**, a **Casanova**, a …’ She grappled for another moniker as her voice broke. ‘He’s dating the girl who owns the shop next door!’ (Raisin, p.19 ); 6) proper name with the definite article, used to identify the person with the allusive name. Example 21: ‘But we are talking of a great mind, the **Nietzsche** of our long, dark, dying country’ (Bradbury, p.59); Example 22 : ‘…and sees him as the modern **Goethe**’(Bradbury, p.25); 7) allusive proper name preceded by a name in the possessive case . Example 23 : ‘…he is a literary writer. He’s Leicester’s **Proust.**’ (Townsend (2), p.283)

In allusive re-naming, the proper name referred to may have a descriptive epithet to make the image more vivid. Example 24: He is going home! Home for the first time in eleven weeks, though in his heart it might as easily be eleven years, himself a grizzled **Ulysses** straining his eyes for the blue shadow of Ithaca (Miller, p.105)

It is not infrequently that allusive names are used with verbs in subjunctive mood, in unreal conditional sentences, mostly to produce a humorous effect. Example 25: Feigning stupidity was one of my specialities. If stupidity were theoretical physics, then I would be **Albert Einstein** (Bradley, p.161); Example 26: ‘We have created a great bureaucracy that would drive even **Frantz Kafka** crazy’ (Bradbury, p.293)

Negative statements containing allusive re- naming are relatively rare. Still we have found some comparative constructions with negative markers, such as unlike, no. Example 27: I am not a **Karl Marx** (Bradbury, p.166); Example 28:…he may be very lovely looking and quite unassuming, and seemingly unlike Jane Austen’s dastardly **Darcy** ( Brown, p.184); Example 29: I knew that Inspector Gravenhurst was no **Prince Charming**, and Mrs Bannerman no **Cinderella** (Bradley, p.305)

Quite interestingly, allusive names can sometimes function as nominal parts of other verbs than “to be”, but such cases are rare. Example 30: I don’t want to end up getting plastered and quite possibly making an even bigger fool of myself by going all maudlin and **Miss Havisham** on him (Brown, p.169).**.**

1.1 Allusions Represented by Two-Proper -Name Structures.

There have been found a considerable number of proper names used in pairs: Romeo and Juliet, forming a single unit. Example 31: I *know* that I am her only true love, and that she is mine. We are **Arthur and Guinevere**, **Romeo and Juliet**, **Charles and Camilla** (Townsend (1), p.11). In the next example we can see allusion to two characters from the novel by George Du Maurier Trilby: the musician whose ambition was to become a famous singer but who was unable to realize his dream due to inadequate vocal abilities. However, he has a gift of suggestion and makes a girl called Trilby sing under his control. So these two names, Svengali and Trilby, have become allusions to the person of strong will and great influence and the one acting under his influence. Example 32: I suggested to him that he should run across the road to Next and ask an assistant to rig him out with clothing suitable for Capri in April. Brain-box did as I suggested: he was **Trilby** to my **Svengali** (Townsend (2), p.359). Example 33: After I had introduced the two most important women in my life, they looked each other up and down forensically. It was like introducing **Maigret** to **Inspector Morse**. Every detail of dress and nuance of expression was noted (Townsend (2), p.425)

However, two unrelated proper names are sometimes juxtaposed in a contrasting comparative phrase “more PN 1 than PN2”. Example 34: The atmosphere in my parents’ room was more **Pinter** than **Dickens**.There was a Christmas tree in the corner of the room but it was a scraggy affair and looked as though it was apologizing for its almost bare branches (Townsend (2), p.174). Example 35: I was stopped in my tracks by the sight of my own papercut pictures on the wall opposite: there was no mistaking it, for it was of Mum seated like **Boudicca** in a chariot-like wheelchair among a **Sleeping Beauty** tangle of thorns (Brown, p.361). Example 36: She didn’t seem the **Jackie Kennedy** or **Joan Collins** type to me (Bradbury, p.232).

2. Allusions Represented by Adjectives Derived from Proper Names

Adjectives derived from allusive proper names may be divided into two groups: 1) adjectives formed with the help of suffixes –ean/-ian/an, -ish, -esque, -ic and 2) those formed by the addition of the suffixoids -like, -type, -style. Some of these adjectives are always spelt as one word, while others may be hyphenated. These adjectives can be either fixed, registered in the dictionaries, like Shakespearian, platonic, or neologistic, occasional, created by the author of the book, e.g. Munch-like, Bergman-ish. Their function is mostly that of an epithet. Cases of predicative use may be considered negligible. Let us take a look at some examples in which allusive meaning is conveyed by adjectives derived from precedent proper names. In our material the following types of allusive adjectives were predominant: those formed with suffixes –esque and –ish, and those with suffixoids – type and –style. First of all, it should be said that all these morphemes are highly productive in modern English. The meaning of the suffix –esque is “in the style of, reminding of” and it is used to give a lofty, elevated stylistic connotation. However, we come across occasional adjectives which don’t possess these connotations, such as ‘fishwife-esque thing’(Diamond,p.273) and the Quasimodo-esque in example 37. Example 37 : ..she spluttered, making herself laugh, before pulling another comical expression that was a cross-eyed, jaw-stretched gurn. Kelly gave a small shriek. ‘Oh yeah? Well, I bet yours is like this,’ she cried, distorting her own face to **Quasimodo-esque** proportions (Swan, p.141). The –ish suffix when used with nouns gives it an additional meaning of partial similarity with a shade of negative assessment.For example, ‘makes her seem very little-girl-ish ( Diamond, p.368}. This suffix often serves to form allusive adjectives. Example 38:The wallpaper was **William Morriss-ish**, or maybe even original William Morris (Butland, p.335). Example 39 :And now here she was, bare feet tucked up beneath her on the sofa, pouring wine, music in the background, that **Mona Lisa-ish** secretive smile on the face (Diamond, p.356).Adjectives in –ian/ean occur in our material rather rarely and they are all registered by dictionaries; occasional formations are extremely uncommon. Example 40:She tried to stand, but her legs were jelly. She collapsed on the sofa. With a **Herculean** effort, she forced herself to stand again (Llewellyn, p.385). Example 41: marvellousy **Dickensian** (Townsend (2), p.314).Adjectives with the suffixoid -style are quite common, especially with the names of artists. Example 42: …lavender walls had faded patches where the **Warhol-style** oil paintings of Louis and Samantha had hung (Llewellyn, p.12); Example 43: **Agatha Christie-style** (Brown, 82); Example 44 : …a tiny one-bedroom, turreted, **Hogwarts-style** house…(Brown, p.367); Example 45: She wore a simple **Pre-Raphaelite-style** dress of dark blue wool which showed she had a slim waist and hinted at a shapely bosom (Lodge, p.73) . Adjectives ending in “-like” are also quite numerous. Example 46: Martin imagined writing a story, a **Borges-like** construction where each story contained the kernel of the next and so on (Atkinson (1), p.243)

3. Allusions Represented by Verbs Derived from Proper Names.

This is an extremely rare type of occasional word formations. We have been able to find only one type of verb derivation, namely, by conversion, whereas verbs formed by prefixation according to the model of the Shakespearean phrase “to out-Herod Herod” which we initially supposed to be of some frequency have not been found in the texts studied. The two examples found of allusions represented by verbs formed by conversion from proper names can be seen below. In both cases the resulting verb consists of a first name + surname (both capitalized). The “-ed” marker of the verb is added to the surname. In example 47 the predicate is spelt with a hyphen, while in example 48 the predicative participle is spelt in two words. Example 47: They’d agreed early on that they were laid-back parents. They mocked couples who **Gina-Forded** their babies (Llewellyn, p.217). The occasional verb here means “ to behave like a follower of Gina Ford”, a specialist in child care who insisted on sticking to a strict discipline in taking care of babies, a woman, who, ironically, was childless herself. In the next example the allusive meaning of the verb “to Jackson Pollock” is “to look like an abstract picture by Jackson Pollock , described as a “complicated lacework of swirling coloured lines ( 5,p.332), in other words “ out of order, messy”. Example 48: And she knew that what he saw in her was the people they had been, before life got so messed up for them. She was the blank canvas they had been before they got all **Jackson Pollocked** by life (Noble, p.15)

In conclusion, we would like to give a brief summary of the results obtained in the study of the linguistic representation of allusions in modern British literary texts. First of all, it should be mentioned that allusions to proper names are quite a common phenomenon in modern fiction. Most frequently these are the names of present-day celebrities (actors, artists, etc.) or some personalities of the past who still enjoy popularity. Second, there are numerous linguistic ways of introducing the allusive proper name into the text of the story. Most frequently, the authors use a single proper name in a comparative structure (explicit or implicit). Another popular way of representing an allusion is the so-called re-naming (antonomasia). A single allusive proper name may serve as an epithet. It is a well-known fact, that there are some proper names closely linked together by contextual ties (like Romeo and Juliet). In our material several examples of such fixed double names have been found. Sometimes, however, writers produce their own pairs of names, evoking either similar or contrasting images. Third, many proper names of allusive nature can form adjectives which represent the allusive meaning of the proper name on a more abstract level. The English language is extremely rich in suffixes denoting allusive similarity, and modern writers of fiction make effective use of them. Fourth, there exists another, less frequent way of representing allusions, namely, occasional formation of verbs from the original proper name by conversion.

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