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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

CULTURAL CONTINUITY AS AN ADVERTISING COMPONENT IN THE ENGLISH FILMONYMS

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Abstract

The present article analyses cultural continuity of the English filmonyms, which is seen as the reflection of the socio-cultural background of native speakers and the changes in it, and can be expressed in the film titles. The article represents a detailed analysis of the trends that can be traced in foreign film titles in English throughout the 20th century, the 21st century and nowadays. Comparing the film titles of different years, the authors identify the ways of reflecting cultural continuity in the choice of a title. Cinema is a special kind of art that is aimed at a wide audience with a constantly changing cultural background, and, like all types of mass media, it needs advertising. In our modern world many people face the problem of selecting a good film or a cartoon for watching more often, and their choice may depend on the film title because it should reflect its theme, idea and content. Original filmonyms from the websites Kinopoisk, Ivi.ru and the International Movie Database (IMDb) were chosen by use of a continuous sampling method. The lack of profound research on the titles of narrative films and the ways of their development throughout the history of the cinema has determined the relevance of the present work.

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1. Introduction

Cinema is an integral part of modern culture. The factors influencing the choice of a film for watching include not only the description, posters, advertising, slogans, names of the director and/ or the actors, but also the title of the film. It makes a possible viewer think about what the film will be about and decide whether to watch it or not.

Taking into account the apparent functional similarities between the film title and the text title, it was decided to include them into the category of ideonyms, which are used to name the objects of spiritual culture, and to add the scientific term “**filmonym**” to the existing list of -onyms (Knysh, 1992, p. 5). This term was suggested by E. Knysh and is used in this article with the meaning of a "film title".

Movie titles are films' eyes, having double effect of art appreciation and commercial advertisement, and directly playing the role of guidance and promotion. With the continuous development of international cultural exchanges, film begins to get the attention of every nation increasingly as an important media in cultural exchange (Zhihong, 2018).

2. Problem Statement

There are several approaches to determining the functions of the film title itself, as well as the features of its selection from the film industry's point of view.

Clair (1981) talks about the title of the film as an advertisement, clarifying “cinema is, first of all, an industry, and between the brain that conceives the film and the screen that reflects it, there is an entire industrial organization and its financial needs” (p. 12). Many specialists (Zhou, 2017; Lushnikova & Shubenkova, 2013; Modestov, 2006) speak of the title as an advertisement and "business card" in a general sense, applicable to any artwork and not necessarily to a film.

Sergeenkov (2015) from the Twentieth Century Fox CIS confirms that the film title has an advertising function. He also points out that the film title is subjected to all the rules usually applied when creating advertising slogans for a product promotion; it must be short, catchy, appealing, easy to pronounce and easy to remember. According to Sergeenkov (2015), the advertising component of the film title may even replace its informative function (p. 59).

Petrova (2016), talking about the director's attempts to interest potential viewers, writes about the cultural component of the film title. According to her theory, the film title becomes a cultural “label”, and, in this regard, the film director chooses a form that would correspond to the pragmatic goals of the title (p. 193).

Tying together all the discussed functions, it is necessary to highlight the ones that a filmonym should perform:

- to be able to interest the viewer in watching the film (an influencing function);
- to relate to the content of the film, to reflect it and not to contradict it (an informative function);
- to consider the social and cultural background of the potential audience and be memorable (a socio-cultural component of the influencing function).

The discussed approaches to the definitions and functions of advertising and film titles have allowed us to notice that both advertising and the filmonyms have social and cultural components from the

advertising point of view. Cinema is a mass art, and advertising must take into account social and cultural backgrounds of the society it is oriented at, otherwise, it will not work. The film title is chosen according to the socio-cultural background of the viewer in order to be remembered and to provoke certain thoughts and, as a result, provoke interest in the film itself.

3. Research Questions

Changes in the life and culture of a society, cultural traditions and mentality can also affect the choice of a filmonym. Dolgunova (2017) points out that the very process of recognizing the precedent text in the titles causes an emotional response in the reader and contributes to the activation of his intellectual activity, and, consequently, purchasing, which solves the problem of any advertiser.

Rogova (2015). notes that the language game techniques can be used by authors of advertising texts in order to influence a potential buyer; in her works, the language game is considered as a means of persuasive communication (p. 68).

Researchers from different countries focus on a problem of film naming, considering the title of the film to be a visual-and-semantic center of a polycode text, connecting multiple codes presented by storylines, ideological content, genre characteristics, visuals and sound (Afanaskina, 2017; Zhou, 2017; Hepp et al., 2015; Surduk & Urban, 2016).

The cultural continuity and the influence of culture on a person as a member of this culture and the formation of patterns of thinking processes in the language are expressed in *socio-cultural items*, *language play*, *memes* (mainly Internet memes) and *precedence*. If a filmonym is an advertisement for a film, then ways to express cultural continuity can also be used in filmonyms in order to attract viewers. Based on this, it is possible to trace how filmonyms can be changed throughout history and what cultural phenomena can be expressed in them in order to attract the audience with the appropriate social and cultural background.

The titles usually comply with the story, idea and philosophy of the film. Moreover, they should reflect the film content, artistic conception and be attractive for the target audience. Besides the nominative (nomination and identification), communicative, informative and aesthetic functions, which are common for all headlines, film titles perform the functions of anticipation and attraction, as well as advertising and pragmatic functions (Albright, 2017; Dawkins, 1989; Golan, 2010; Ismailova, 2017; Scriabina, 2016).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present research is to identify the trends in the ways of reflecting cultural continuity in the choice of film titles in English. 2117 English filmonyms from 1945 to 2019 were taken as a material for the research. The time period from 1945 was chosen as in this year the large-scale military operations (World War II), which had lasted for several years before, finished.

Since the film is aimed at a wide audience and needs advertising, and the film text has several features, the film title can be considered as a separate phenomenon, included in the context of advertising.

5. Research Methods

A combination of various methods has been used in the present research. The selection of original

filmonyms from the popular websites Kinopoisk, Ivi.ru and the International Movie Database (IMDb) was done by use of a continuous sampling method. To conduct content analysis, the data from online sources has been collected. After the content analysis used as a research method, the patterns were interpreted and the results were presented in diagrams and tables for visual proof and support of the research goals. The present study is accompanied by the linguistic and stylistic analyses of the film titles, which belong to various time periods.

Discourse analysis as a research method was used as well for studying the cinema language in relation to its social context. It aims to understand how language is reflected in real film titles in English. While doing discourse analysis, the focus was on the purposes and effects of different types of language used in filmonyms. This helps understand how filmonyms are related to the social, political and historical context.

6. Findings

We have noted that throughout history, English filmonyms have been characterized by the use of a precedent text that refers to the socio-cultural background of the English-speaking audience. The precedent text is defined as the basis for collective discourse, the main condition for the ideological mutual understanding and social identification, and the interpretation unit of human values through the language prism with the help of cultural memory (Ilyushkina, 2008).

The precedence found in English filmonyms can represent classical literature and paintings, catchphrases, names and lines of popular songs, mythology, the Bible, as well as the new formations of the current Internet environment.

Precedence in the English filmonyms of the 21st century has become more common. In the filmonyms of 1945-1999 we found from 1 to 3 cases of precedence per decade, while in the period of 2000-2010 there were 9 cases of precedence, and in the period of 2011-2019 – 10 cases of precedence (see Figure 1).

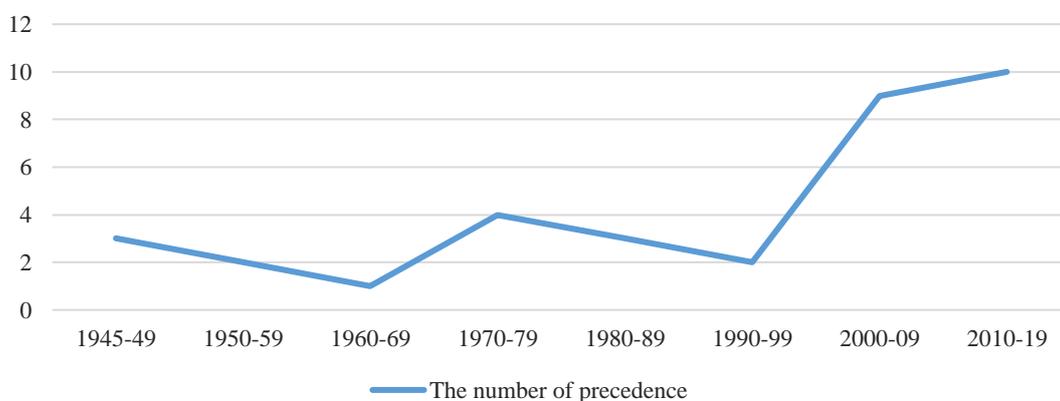


Figure 01. A graph of the change in the number of precedence in the English filmonyms

A detailed analysis of the selected precedent phenomena in the English filmonyms is presented in table 1.

Table 01. Precedent text in the filmonyms of the English-speaking world from 1945 to 2019

Film	Precedent text
1945-1949	
1. Unfaithfully Yours	A precedent situation – a typical ending of a letter / message (<i>faithfully yours</i>), but with an added negative connotation.
2. Adam's Rib	Precedent text – description of a woman with reference to the Bible
1950-1959	
1. Scrooge	Precedent name – the name of Scrooge, a famous character from the work by Ch. Dickens “A Christmas Carol”
1. The Ten Commandments	The precedent text is a reference to the 10 commandments from the Bible
1960-1969	
1. The Flight of the Phoenix	Precedent name – the name of a mythological creature
1970-1979	
1. Young Frankenstein	Precedent name Frankenstein – a reference to the name of a famous literary character
2. I Wanna Hold Your Hand	The precedent text is the title and a line of a song by The Beatles
3. And Justice for All	Precedent text – the last words of the oath of allegiance to the US flag
1980-1989	
1. Young Frankenstein	Precedent name Frankenstein – a reference to the name of a famous literary character
2. I Wanna Hold Your Hand	The precedent text is the title and a line of a song by The Beatles
3. And Justice for All	Precedent text – the last words of the oath of allegiance to the US flag
1990-1999	
1. The Fifth Element	The precedent situation is a reference to the four basic elements that make up the world
2. The Sixth Sense	The precedent situation is a reference to the five basic human feelings
2000-2010	
1. Treasure Planet	The precedent text is a changed title of the book Treasure Island
2. The Butterfly Effect	The precedent text is “the butterfly effect”, the name of the chaos theory about minor events and their consequences.
3. Good Boy!	The precedent text is typically said to a dog if it behaves well
4. Mona Lisa Smile	The precedent text is the title of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa
5. Across the Universe	The precedent text is the title and a line of a song by The Beatles
6. Girl with a Pearl Earring	The precedent text is the name of a famous painting

7. Finding Neverland	Precedent name Neverland – the name of a fictional country from the story about Peter Pan
8. Cinderella Man	Precedent name Cinderella is the name of the heroine of a famous fairy tale
9. Friday the 13th	The precedent text is a day traditionally considered unlucky (Friday the 13th).
2010-2019	
1. Nowhere Boy	The precedent text is the title and a line of a song by The Beatles in an altered form (original - <i>Nowhere Man</i>)
2. The Kids Are All Right	The precedent text is the title and a line of a song by The Who band
3. Gnomeo and Juliet	The precedent names are modified names of the characters of the play “Romeo and Juliet” by W. Shakespeare
4. Your Highness	The precedent text is a typical appeal to a ruler/high-ranking official
5. LOL	The precedent text is the Internet acronym for <i>laughing out loud</i> (it's very funny)
6. Now You See Me	The precedent expression is a catchphrase describing the activities of magicians and illusionists: <i>now you see me, now you don't</i> .
7. I, Frankenstein	The precedent name Frankenstein is a reference to the name of a famous literary character
8. Bohemian Rhapsody	The precedent text is the name of a song by the band Queen
9. Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again	The precedent text is the name and a line of a song by ABBA in a modified form (original: <i>Mamma mia! Here I go again</i>)

The use of the culture-specific items familiar to the English-speaking audience has always been typical of English filmonyms. We remember that culture-specific items in linguistics are everyday and specific national words and phrases. According to the approach of Gergert (2014), culture-specific items in linguistics include collocations, since they can also reflect the way of life and thinking of the people and, therefore, can reflect cultural continuity in the language.

The culture-specific items that are used in the English film titles include the names of traditional customs and holidays of Western countries, social and cultural phenomena of a country, historical events familiar to the Western audience, as well as collocations, idioms, proverbs and sayings.

We have found that the use of culture-specific items in filmonyms was in the number of 2 to 6 per decade, with the largest number (6) occurring in 2010-2019 (see Figure 2).

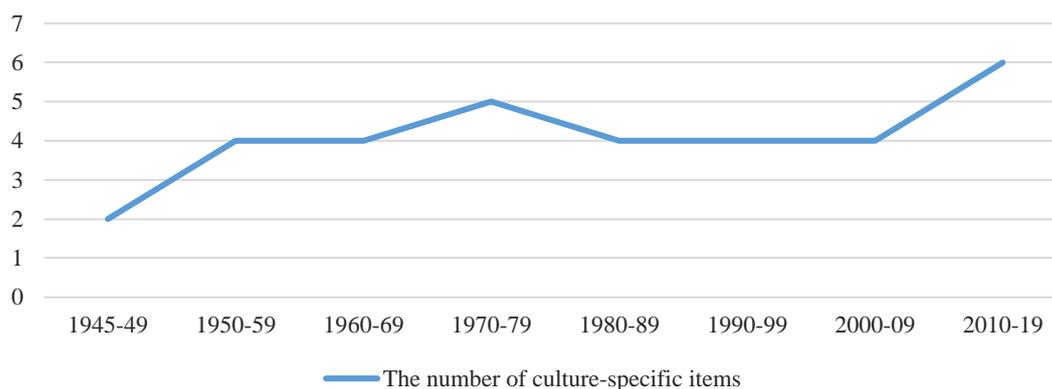


Figure 02. A graph of the number of culture-specific items in the English filmonyms

In the 20th century, several filmonyms used alliteration (repetition of sounds), which gave them expressiveness and made them memorable – *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), *the Dirty Dozen* (1967), *Dirty Dancing* (1987). The use of alliteration has disappeared so far, but there is a tendency to use rhyme in filmonyms. This can be noted in some filmonyms of 2000-2019: *Roger Dodger* (2002), *The Door in the Floor* (2004), *from Prada to Nada* (2011), *Need for Speed* (2014). The wordplay based on consonance has become more common: *Knight & Day* (2010), *Hoodwinked Too! Hood vs. Evil* (2011).

For creating wordplay, screenwriters and directors can use the ambiguity of words: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), *Love and Other Drugs* (2011), use stylistic techniques like oxymoron: *Little Big Man* (1970), and modify the usual collocations: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), *Swiss Army Man* (2016). There are cases when connotative words are used: *Cop Out* (2010), *Kick-Ass* (2010).

Throughout the period chosen for the survey, wordplay was also observed at the syntactic level. In the filmonyms different types of sentences according to their purpose (interrogative and exclamatory) can be used in order to attract the attention of a possible viewer: *I Want to Live!* (1958), *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966), *O Lucky Man!* (1973), *Horton Hears a Who!* (2008), *What's Your Number?* (2011). The cases of using ellipsis marks in filmonyms are as follows: *The Knack ...and How to Get It* (1965), *If...* (1968), *28 Days Later...* (2002).

In the 1970s wordplay at the graphic level began to appear in filmonyms, which continued until the end of the 20th century: *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (*But Were Afraid to Ask)* (1972), *The Secret of My Succe\$s* (1987), *Se7en* (1995). In the 21st century, this tendency is actively developing: *REC* (2007), *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (2008), *Frost/Nixon* (2009), *mother!* (2017).

Throughout the history of the English film titles, there has been a trend to give films bright and catchy titles consisting of a *single word*. It is usually either a noun referring to the main character/group of characters, the central event of the film, or a key subject or object from the film, or an adjective or participle describing the main character, group of characters, state of the hero, or general mood of the film. The number of such filmonyms varied from 20% to 31% of the total number of them over the decade (with a slight decline in the 1950s, when the number was only 12%). The highest percentage was achieved in 2010-2019 (31%).

Filmonyms represented by a single noun appeared in large numbers throughout the decades of the studied period: *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960), *The Godfather* (1972), *Chinatown* (1974), *Jaws* (1975), *Network* (1976), *Splice* (2009), *Oblivion* (2013), *Lockout* (2012).

At the beginning of the 21st century such filmonyms as *Awake* (2007), *Sinister* (2012), and *Brave* (2012), which are single adjectives, start to appear actively. In the 20th century only two filmonyms of this type were found: *Notorious* (1946) and *Big* (1988).

Around the first decades of the 21st century, a tendency to give films the titles consisting of single participles appeared as well: *Uninvited* (2009), *Tangled* (2011), *Frozen* (2013), *Split* (2017). In the 20th century similar filmonyms also existed, but in smaller numbers, about 1 filmonym per decade: *Caged* (1950), *the Unforgiven* (1960), *The Beguiled* (1971).

The change in the percentage of filmonyms represented by a single word (against the background of the total number of filmonyms studied at each period) is shown in figure 3.

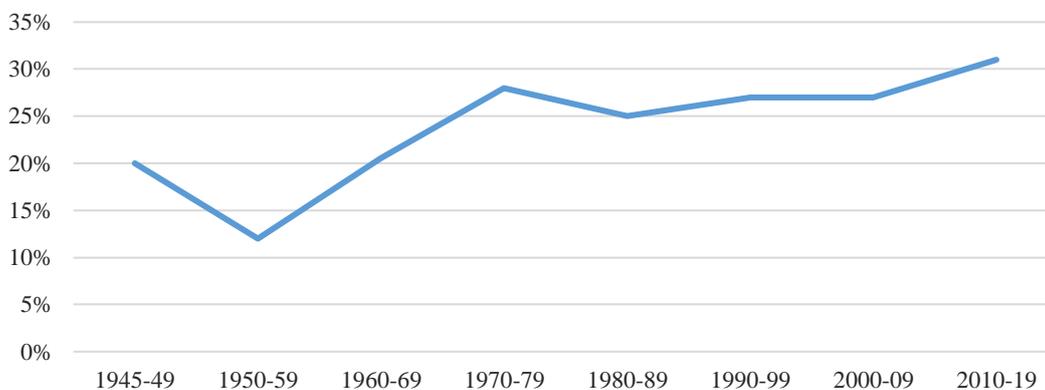


Figure 03. The change in the percentage of filmonyms represented by one word

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, cultural continuity as the reflection of the changes in socio-cultural background of native speakers is expressed in the film titles.

Trends in reflecting cultural continuity change throughout history and lie within the interests and the way of thinking of new generations of viewers; some trends may gradually disappear, but new ones appear instead.

Current trends in reflecting cultural continuity in the English filmonyms are the following:

- the growing number of precedence from different sources (music, mythology, the Bible, pop culture);
- the use of culture-specific items (mainly idioms);
- wordplay at all language levels (mainly at phonetic and graphic levels); wordplay based on the ambiguity of words prevails at the lexical and stylistic levels);
- the increase in the number of short filmonyms consisting of one word.

However, more subtle trends should be highlighted as well:

1) The precedent texts in the English filmonyms of the 20th century are represented by classical literature and paintings, catchphrases, titles and lines of popular songs, ancient mythology and the Bible; however, no precedence related to poetry or folk and urban folklore has been found.

2) In English-speaking countries, the trend towards using wordplay at the graphic level began in the 1970s and continues up to these days.

3) Phonetic wordplay (alliteration, rhymes and consonance) is typical of the English filmonyms of the 20th century.

4) Precedence based on popular songs continues to appear in the English filmonyms.

5) It is worth noting that the development of the Internet is scarcely represented in the English filmonyms (1 example of the precedent text).

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