



Revisiting Semantic Issues of Proper Names: A Vietnamese Perspective

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Abstract

The semantic status of proper names in linguistics and language philosophy has been comprehensively studied. It has long been held that proper names are mainly used to refer to certain entities, not to describe them. However, while Millian theorists claim that proper names do not possess a lexical meaning but directly refer to a certain entity, Fregean scholars assert that proper names do carry meanings, and the problem is just about the “meaning” employed. This paper argues that the Mill-Frege dichotomy can be bridged from the Vietnamese perspective by using proper name specifics of the Vietnamese language, and that as a cultural universal, names convey both denotational and connotational contents. However, the content of names can only be determined in each specific language community based on clarification of traditional and cultural values embodied in the naming process.

Keywords: semantics, anthroponymy, toponymy, Viet Nam, Vietnamese, Mill, Frege

Introduction

Name researchers have long been interested in proper names and the problem posed by determining the meaning of proper names (hereafter PNs). Views on this theoretical problem often fall into two different schools of thought. The first argues that PNs have meaning, whereas the second one insists that PNs do not possess a lexical meaning but directly refer to a certain entity. John Stuart Mill maintained that a PN does not connote any attributes at all, but serves simply as a marker for that individual. In contrast, Gottlob Frege argued that PNs do carry meanings, and the problem is simply the type of “meaning” employed.

This article addresses the issue of the sense of PNs. However, it does so by taking an angle different from those held by the traditional schools: PNs may denote, refer, associate, or connote different individuals and entities, and names do not necessarily lexically mean anything at all. PNs are not merely labels or tags which individuals carry along with them. Although PNs do not have lexical sense, they do have connotative or implicative meaning which derives from, and is intimately related to, their content.

Using this approach, the article first examines proper names and the issues involving common nouns and proper nouns (Section 2). Section 3 addresses on philosophical opinions about the semantics of PNs and focusses on the positions held by the Millian and Fregean schools. This discussion is followed in Section 4 by an account of Vietnamese views on the issue of meaning of Vietnamese PNs. Section 5 presents the Vietnamese perspective on bridging the gap between the Millian and the Fregean from a linguistic point of view. The final section draws a conclusion and posits that PNs have both denotational and connotational contents. It further postulates that such contents can be identified by clarifying the traditional and cultural values of each language community (Section 6).

An Onomastic Account of Proper Names

When defining PNs, scholars often start their voyage of discovery by attempting to differentiate between common nouns (appellatives) and proper nouns (Lisbach & Meyer 2013; Anderson 2007; van Langendonck 2007; Pham 2004; Coates 2000, 2006a; Nuessel 1992; Le 1992; Algeo 1973; Zabeeh 1968; Gardiner 1954; Pulgram 1954). However, scholars disagree over the ultimate definition of proper nouns (and/or names). In line with the standard dichotomies used in structural linguistics (e.g., Saussure’s *langue* vs. *parole* and Chomsky’s *competence* vs. *performance*), a definition of PN could be based on drawing a distinction between common nouns, which name or refer to a whole class of objects or general entities, and (proper) names, which designate individual referents and distinguish them from others (Lombard 2008; Sanders 2004; Chomsky 1957). PNs are differentiated from proper nouns in that PNs can include ordinary dictionary words (Chalker 1998). In other, more technical terms, according to Huddleston (1996), a proper noun is a grammatical noun subclass, while a PN is “the institutionalized name of some specific person, place, organization, etc., institutionalized by some formal act of naming and/or registration” (96).

Obviously, common nouns and proper nouns/names are systematically different in both grammar and semantics. However, there is no denying that a certain degree of overlap exists between them. For example, proper nouns are written with an initial capital letter (Crystal 2003), but not all words with initial capitalization are proper nouns. There is also some uncertainty as to when a word should be considered proper or common. Coates’ binominals such as *Dalai Lama/lama*; *West Bank/bank*; *Sun/sun* are some interesting examples

(2000). A proper noun conventionally constitutes an individualized name or name of an individual. However, sometimes a common noun may be used in the definite form to refer to a unique entity. In such instances, it is mono-referential and works as a PN. For example:

(1) Viet Nam is a socialist republic with a one-party system led by the Communist Party of Viet Nam. As a result, the word *Đảng* ‘the Party’ or *đảng* ‘the party’ has long been used in both written and spoken Vietnamese to refer to *Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam* ‘the Communist Party of Viet Nam’.

(2) *West Bank* literally elliptically means ‘the west bank of the River Jordan in the Middle East’ but is now used as a PN, as in the case “RCCE continues in response to the surge in COVID-19 cases in the *West Bank*” (UN 2020).

The words *party* (1) and *west bank* (2) in the examples given above definitely denote unique entities (i.e., a unique party, a unique area). At the same time, a name may be treated as a common noun or seemingly become class-designating in certain circumstances when it is used in a particular way, although pluralization is impossible under the default interpretation of PNs (e.g., “*The Kardashians*” or “*one Trump* is enough”). The plural form, *The Vietnamese* (when used in the collective sense), is an ethnonym and therefore a PN, whilst the singular form is not a PN, and may be interpreted as an instance of the ethnic group labelled by the PN, *The Vietnamese*. In addition, there are examples in which the same word can function as both a common noun and a PN, where one such entity is special (e.g., *gods* and *God*). In still other instances, the borderline between common and proper nouns may sometimes be entirely or largely indistinguishable.¹

Last but not least, in many cases, it is extremely difficult to differentiate if a noun is proper or common. This difficulty is posed, for instance, by the case of popular brands or trademarks. As Coates (2006a) explains, any PN may potentially come to be used as a common noun or in a common expression “through a trope by which an object is associated with a named individual, and by its subsequent taking-on of that individual’s name” (316-17). In such cases, the brand name is simply adopted directly as a generic term (i.e., it denotes a class of items, not a branded individual subset of that class).

In English, some of the best-known instances of this phenomenon are *sellotape*, *wellingtons*, *google*, and *iPad*. *Sellotape* is a brand name for a long, thin strip of sticky material that is used for joining together things. *Wellingtons* (*Wellington boots*, *wellies*) are a type of boot, associated with the first Duke of Wellington. *Google* is the world-number-one search engine. The *iPad* of Apple was such a resounding market success that the word “iPad” has become interchangeable with the word “tablet”. In a similar way, in Viet Nam, many people (especially in the countryside) still call motorbikes of any make and model a *Honda*; and crisps, no matter the brand, may be called *bim bim* which was the name of the first marketed product in Viet Nam. Likewise, Vietnamese-speakers may call a man who is unfaithful a *Sở Khanh*, the name of a literary character from Nguyễn Du’s “Tale of Kiều”. An infamous libertine, the character *Sở Khanh* is the Vietnamese literary equivalent of *Don Juan*. *Oshin*, another fictional example, comes from a Japanese serialized television drama which was aired in Viet Nam in 1994. The drama follows the miserable life of *Shin Tanokura*, starting with her heartbreaking childhood when she is forced to work as a babysitter to support her sharecropper family. The extremely popular series added the word *Ô-sin* or *Ôsin* ‘babysitter’ or ‘au pair’ to the Vietnamese lexicon. (The character name *Shin* is taken from the term “Oshin”, an archaic Japanese cognomen). *Sellotape*, *Wellingtons*, *Google*, *iPad*, *Honda*, *Bim Bim*, *Sở Khanh*, and *Oshin* were all originally PNs; and they are all certainly still real PNs. Nevertheless, they each have “imported” so many characteristics of common nouns that they now function as real common nouns. They, as Coates (2006a) contends, may be seen as courting properhood in that they are used to refer to unique objects at the moment of usage.

In brief, there are some exasperating circumstances in which the dividing line between these two types of nouns cannot easily be drawn up. Such cases make it more difficult to reach a universally agreed definition of PNs. The pragmatic-semantic-syntactic approach to the definition of PNs proposed by van Langendonck (2007) seems best suited to this description of proper names from the Vietnamese perspective. However, the adoption of van Langendonck’s definition is different in that a PN is considered either a noun or a NP (noun phrase) depending on context. In this article, PNs shall be treated as names of persons, places, or certain special things. It will also be assumed that the basic functions of PNs are referring and addressing. That is to say, according to this argument, at the level of established linguistic convention, PNs are used to call, identify, label and/or describe unique entities.

Philosophical Views on Semantics of Proper Names

The combined problem of defining PNs and explaining their meaning has been one of the most difficult to resolve, not only in the field of linguistics, but also for the entire discipline of the philosophy of language. In terms of the meaning/sense of names, there are two main schools, Millian and Fregean, whose difference lies in whether PNs are considered meaningless or meaningful. Millian theorists reject the idea that names have senses and accept Kripke's arguments that names are rigid designators. Fregean scholars, by contrast, hold that names have referent-determining senses; and as epiphenomena, names are considered convenient labels for collections of descriptions of those entities that are named (Morris 2006; Coates 2006b).

According to Mill (1851), the distinguishing feature of names is that they are "unmeaning marks" that have a solely referential or denotational function. In this school of thought, names are non-connotative and do not describe the objects to which they refer. As Coates (2006b, 363) comments, names in Mill's viewpoint apply, denote, and/or refer directly "in virtue of nothing but their arbitrary link with what they apply to" (their denotata).

Kripke (1980, 76) maintains Mill's meaninglessness thesis and focusses especially on Searle's view, which Kripke calls "the cluster theory of names". To this model, Kripke however introduced two new important concepts: the *rigid designator*; and the *causal chain of reference*. According to Kripke, a PN may be defined as a rigid designator in that "in any possible world it designates the same object" (1980, 269). From this perspective, as rigid designators, PNs pick out the same object from all possible worlds. Consequently, PNs are connected with their referents via a causal chain of references which goes back to an initial baptismal act in which the reference is fixed by ostension and/or description (as the case of the artist Prince).²

However, the Millian approach leaves some unsolved questions. By Mill's account, PNs have no connotation. This would mean, however, that there is not anything for the mind to grasp (Hicks 2019). What contribution, then, can a PN make to the meaning of a sentence in which it occurs? How can Mill account for the cognitive significance of identity statements? According to Kripke's argument, from a strictly linguistic perspective, PNs are not necessarily rigid designators; and definite descriptions do not function as rigid designators because "proper names... 'connote' a greater number of properties" (Gary-Prieur 1991, 15).

In contrast with the Millian school, Frege asserted that PNs have both *Bedeutung* 'reference' and *Sinn* 'sense'. The core of Frege's argument is that a name has its sense and referent to the extent that the mode of presentation [of the referent] is contained (termed *denotatum* in Lyons (1977) and Coates (2000)). Fregeans, therefore, maintain that the meaning of a given use of a PN is a set of properties that can be expressed as a description (i.e., that denotes an object that satisfies the description). However, Fregeans are unable to account for rigid designation of names; nor are they able to explain the fact that names never change referents via a change in the circumstance of evaluation. That is, they refer to the same individual in every possible world in which that individual exists (see also Hicks 2019; Haddock 2006; Coates 2000; Evans 1982; McDowell 1977).³

Frege's theory was adopted and developed by many theorists and linguists (e.g., Nelson 1992; Algeo 1973; Russell 1919/1971; Searle 1969/1971, etc.) of whom Bertrand Russell and John Roger Searle are commonly accepted as two of the greatest contributors. Seeming to demonstrate a change from a Millian to a Fregean position, Russell postulates that common nouns both connote and denote, while PNs only denote (1903). He then later postulated that PNs are "truncated" or "shorthand" descriptions (1971, 201). According to Russell, most of the PNs in English are not names at all, but descriptions in disguise (see Ludlow 2018).

Following Searle (1958/1969/1971), PNs do not function as descriptions, but as hooks on which descriptions hang. Searle (1969/1971) posits that when a name is uttered, both the speaker and hearer associate some identifying description: that is, a certain aspect(s) of the descriptive backing of the name which consists of a wide variety of non-linguistic associations that are rooted in the name users' personal, social, cultural, psychological, historical, physical, ecological, geographical, and even spiritual worlds such as their associations, connotations, beliefs, values, and motivational forces.

It is clear that Mill and Frege emphasized different aspects. Whereas Mill focused on the referential nature of names, Frege stressed the *Sinn* 'sense' of PNs. Frege (1892, 56) realized that "to account for their cognitive values", names must have senses, but Frege could not find those senses. Mill (1851) held that names were non-connotative, and he explained the "distinctive conditions of application for non-connotative terms", but he did not accept that names required senses (Justice 2002, 567-76). However, it is not fully persuasive if one deals with PNs, as well as their reference and "meaning", merely from a philosophical perspective because philosophers do not always take into account the distinction between established linguistic convention and language use.

Vietnamese Views on Meaning of Vietnamese Proper Names

One major difference between Vietnamese proper names (VPNs) and English proper names is the problem of meaning. As opposed to Hoang (1979), who claimed that PNs are merely marks that bear no meaning, it is

mostly agreed that PNs do have meaning which will be called “content” here. Particularly, when it comes to Vietnamese scholarship, the vast majority of onomasticians assert that PNs do have meanings (Pham 2004; Le 1992; Tran 1976; Nguyen 1975; Ho 1967; Nguyen 1954). The question then is what kind of meaning (or content) they possess (see also, Nyström 2016; van Langendonck 2007; Le 1991).⁴ Duong (1998) claims that instead of having conceptual meaning as lexical words do, PNs have implicit meaning. According to Le (1991), PNs (specifically placenames) have historical meaning. Le (2008) contends that PNs belong to the practical stratum of sense and expression and therefore carry designated meaning. Pham (2004) asserts that a PN has meaning only when it defines a direct relationship with the named object (though the researcher does not mention what meaning it is).

The meaning of a VPN may be extrapolated from its components, and therefore understood. However, its embeddedness within complex ethno-linguistic contexts necessitates considerable effort for decoding. *Việt Nam*, for example, consists of two components *Việt* (Vietnamese) and *Nam* (the South). The word ‘Nam’ is never used to refer to southern geographical region of Việt. Instead *Viet Nam* is “the South of China”, which is “the North”. This usage can be seen in Lý Thường Kiệt’s sacred poem “Mountains and Rivers of the Southern Country”. Written in 1077, this work is considered to be Viet Nam’s first Declaration of Independence. In it, the poet writes: “Over the mountains and rivers of the South, reigns the Emperor of the South”. Another interesting example here is *Sông Hồng*, “The Red River”. This placename also consists of two components: *sông* ‘river’ and *hồng* ‘red, pink’ (Thanh Lan 2003; Woods 2002; see also Burrill & Bonsack 1962; Burrill 1991).⁵ Parents might name a daughter *Hồng Hà* to commemorate the place where they spent cherished time in the past. Such names are tied to significant moments in name givers’ personal lives and therefore require considerable non-linguistic knowledge to understand them thoroughly.

It is not always easy to determine the intended referential meaning. Take, for example, the male personal name *Đức* or a female personal name *Hằng*. *Đức* may denote the human characteristic (“virtue”), but it may also denote the country ‘Germany’. *Hằng* may refer to the “moon” or “Goddess of the Moon”; or it may refer to human characteristics such as durability, determination, or loyalty. Only the namer can identify what the intended inner, denotative meaning of these names are.

In the Vietnamese language, most VPNs are actually vocabulary words. VPNs make up a special sub-class in the Vietnamese lexicon. This sub-grouping consists of a great number of words, most of which are common words. Indeed, as nominal units, VPNs may be formed from any available lexical word or syllable, particularly personal names (Pham 2004). For this reason, it has been argued that VPNs are in fact common words and therefore have all the properties of lexical words (including meaning). This thinking may result in the dilemma that names in Vietnamese have denotative, significative and pragmatical meaning or sense, just as common words do. Consequently, VPNs could be legitimately regarded as homonyms of Vietnamese common words. This view leads to the following questions: Do VPNs have meaning? If so, is their meaning the same or different from that of their lexical homonyms?

To begin to understand the denotational meaning or content of a common name in a particular language, speakers have to link it with a definite concept (usually the concept of a class of things). Therefore, the definiteness of a named object is often not required to understand that object. For instance, to comprehend the word “*classroom*”, speakers first have to link it with rooms in schools, colleges, or other educational institutions. By comparison, a PN works as a definite name for an individual or entity; and normally it does not represent any general concept. For example, a Vietnamese name like *Nguyễn Thị Phòng* does not require that Vietnamese speakers make a link between the given name and a “room”, although *phòng* means ‘room’ in Vietnamese. Speakers of this language also do not make the nonsensical assumption that the bearer of this name is a “room” or bears any relation to an actual room. Therefore, to understand a VPN, no linkage is made to a general concept as is the case of common nouns. It is obvious that the meaning of a name, if it has any, is not the same as that of the homonymous word of the name.

Typically, a common word has three types of meaning: denotative, significative, and pragmatical. However, the only definite meaning of a name is the denotation it acquires through its bestowal. In other words, a PN obtains its fundamental meaning through its functions of representing individuals and identifying unique entities in actual contexts. In this sense, a name is nothing more than a label, a tag, or a signpost. However, in the case of VPNs, in addition to this basic meaning, it seems that they have other meanings, or at least what may be defined as contents attached to each name. To illustrate this point, let us once again examine personal names. Given names in Viet Nam are commonly chosen by parents and they frequently have a literal meaning in the Vietnamese language. For example, VPNs often represent pleasing objects, attributes, characteristics, qualities, or wishes parents want in their child (e.g., flowers, jewelry, modesty, bravery, loyalty, happiness, success, etc.) (Le 1992).

On the individual level, for example, when Vietnamese parents give their sons the common male personal name *Sơn* ‘mountain’ or their daughters the popular female personal name *Hà* ‘river’, their selection is in line with culturally determined gender norms. This is not where the story ends, however. The lexeme *son hà* means ‘nation’ or ‘country’, so parents who select this name for their child might show their patriotism.⁶ In Vietnamese families with two children, the names *son* and *hà* may be used to express harmony and satisfaction, as the

names may present two ideal opposing factors in yin-yang balance. The names *Son* and *Hà* may therefore have a number of different meanings (or contents) attached to them, depending upon the context. However, all of the meanings are related to those of the lexical homonyms (i.e., they connote homonymous words). Such meanings of VPNS may therefore be considered connotative meanings which may be defined as the contents of the names.

The meaning of VPNS is clearly reflected when it comes to naming negative, positive, intellectual, or common characters in works of traditional literature and folklore. In Viet Nam, it is commonly believed that a person with a positive character should have a literally attractive name, and a name-bearer with a negative character should have an unattractive name. The evaluative difference between the two is based on the associative lexical meaning of the word(s) that form the name. For example, a so-called “good girl” might be named *Tâm*, and a “bad girl” *Câm*. The words *tâm* and *câm* are common names of processed rice products. *Tâm* is broken husked rice that can be cooked and eaten; whereas *câm* is mashed rice husk that is inedible. In some areas of the country, there is an interesting twist on this tradition. As it is commonly believed that children with beautiful names are more frequently visited by death (Le 1992), some Vietnamese parents may give their children very terse or coarse sounding names and/or names that denote taboo entities such as *Cu* ‘penis’, *Him* ‘vulva’, *Còi* ‘stunted’, etc.

To recap, this argumentation has shown that VPNS do have meaning but it is not directly lexical. Although many VPNS were originally common words, they, unlike common words, do not attribute properties to name-bearers; instead, they may be contextually associated with the name-bearers. VPNS are homonyms but not synonyms of common words. Thus, they do not hold any asserted lexical meaning like that held by their common homonyms. However, due to their relationship to common words, the meaning of VPNS is often inspired or formed based on the meaning of lexical words. VPNS are therefore argued to have contents, which are their very connotative meanings defined in relation to their name-bearers.

Vietnamese Perspective on Bridging the Mill-Frege Dichotomy from a Linguistic View

Coates (2006b, 2000) has doubts as to whether the terms “Morning Star” (MS) and “Evening Star” (ES) are actually PNs. What is now clear is that MS and ES are surely “singular expressions with a unique denotation” and therefore arguably proper “only under certain mental conditions in the speaker” (2000, 1164). Peterson (1989, 91) asserts that PNs “have meaning only by virtue of the performer’s knowledge of or experiences with the referent itself”; they do not have meaning as a result of “any linguistic competence”. In a different position, van Langendonck (2007, 38) contends that “the question of whether PNs have meaning may well be the wrong question, the right one being in what way the meanings are construed and function”.

In the position taken here, the question is not whether names have meaning/sense. It is the way we define “meaning” or “sense” that posits that names are meaningful or meaningless. If “sense” is understood to refer to direct asserted lexical meaning, then PNs do not have “sense”. However, if “sense” is used to refer to all probable information about the name (i.e., the “content” of the name), then PNs do have sense. Moreover, as human beings, we may intuit the meaning of an expression or utterance, regardless of whether it is common or proper. The fact is, swapping one name for another changes the communicative value of a phrase or sentence. For instance, “We went to Primark” and “We went to 99p Stores” obviously contain different communicative contents. Besides, if names were meaningless, then why do some names appear more meaningful than others? In 2006, both *Primark* and *99p Stores* were unfamiliar to many. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that consumers made a link to “99 pence” and presumed that products in the *99p Stores* were potentially cheap or cheaper than in other shops. Given such examples, the notion that PNs are entirely meaningless does not seem to be particularly persuasive in everyday language experience.

In fact, none of the aforementioned-named scholars (from either philosophical and linguistic tradition) really commit themselves to the view that PNs have lexical meaning. In English, the question about the meaning of PNs seems not to have been as intensely explored as in Vietnam, where names are so frequently picked from vocabulary words, the meaning of names is often questioned. However, in discourse, lexical relations can be “applied to items [proper names] without reference to their semantic qualities” (Murphy 2003, 35). The lexical meaning of words/names is not counted and names function much like mere labels. For example, the word *phúc* lexically means ‘blessing, happiness’, but when it is used as a name in Viet Nam, people see it as a name (a pointer) rather than a word. This all adds support to Coates’ (2006a) assertion that most lexical names are meaningful at the time of creation or bestowal, but as the time passes, they cease to be meaningful (e.g., Puritan names) or temporarily stop being meaningful in discourse (e.g., Vietnamese given names). Therefore, in a narrow sense, it is contended here that PNs are senseless.

With regard to the sense of PNs, this paper’s argument is in line with van Langendonck’s position that names have meaning, “at least if presuppositional information can be called meaning” (2007, 85-86). Using his

example “The king of Persia attacked Athens”, the researcher explains that the presupposed content is *the king of Persia* and the asserted meaning is “there existed a king of Persia long ago” (2007, 86). By presupposed, van Langendonck refers to the categorial, associative, emotive, and grammatical meaning.

In brief, with their semiotic nature, it seems clear that PNs in general and VPNS in particular have a complex and heterogeneous structure. Their constituents contain information of all kinds (e.g., historical, cultural, social, psychological, etc.) which in turn characterizes a certain language community. To understand a PN, we must define a relationship between the name and the name-bearer after determining the name constituents. The meaning/sense of PNs on a semantic basis is a very complicated problem for not only onomastics but also other scientific fields that involve the formal study names. Given this complexity, the purpose here is not to present a universal solution but to propose a linguistic/onomastic approach to build a bridge between differing views on the semantic status of PNs.

Conclusion

As presented in this paper, PNs are meaningless if sense is understood as direct asserted lexical meaning, but PNs do have meaning if sense is construed as the content of names. PNs do have content. Whether or not they also have meaning depends, however, on their content in discourse use. Appellatives must have meaning in order to function properly, while names must have content. The main functions of names are to denote and to connote, respectively (Nicolaisen 1995, 1978). By meaning, both presuppositional and asserted lexical meaning are meant, while “sense” refers only to asserted lexical meaning. It is important to emphasize that “even if names can and do function without lexical meaning, some societies tend to put a strong emphasis on the semantic transparency of names, and various social functions may be attached to these meanings” (Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003, 31). Therefore, the lexical meaning of the name needs to be taken into account in the socio-onomastic analysis of many anthroponymic systems. As was shown here, this is especially the case when examining Vietnamese. Finally, the argument presented here concludes that the problem of PN meaning/sense is best solved by taking into account the unique traditions and values of each language community and their naming processes.

Notes

¹ For example, *British*, *Vietnamese* or *Celts* are considered PNs, but *soldier*, *sailor*, and *celebrity* are not conventionally accepted as names.

² *Prince* (born *Prince Rogers Nelson*) was known by the unpronounceable symbol ♯ which he used between 1993 and 2000. During that time, many referred to him as “the artist formerly known as Prince” or “TAFKAP” or *The Artist*.

³ Coates (2000) argues that the two terms MS and ES were coined at a time when people did not realize these objects were the same. It is only now through our increased astronomical knowledge that we know that MS and ES have the same denotatum. Many theorists like McDowell (1977), Evans (1982), Haddock (2006), and Hicks (2019) also criticize what Frege calls *Sinn* because of the difficulty of interpreting this term as referencing lexical meaning, as it seems more to be a term for either meaningfulness or meaning in a broader sense. According to Dummet (1993), Frege’s *Sinn* is a question of what every individual knows separately. This would equate *Sinn* in PNs with associative, accidental meaning attributed by different or even the same speakers (van Langendonck 2007).

⁴ Le (1991/1992) asserts that most PNs (in Vietnamese) have meaning. As van Langendonck (2007) maintains, PNs do carry certain meanings. Nyström (2016) classifies such meanings as denotational vs. connotational meanings; lexical vs. proprial meanings; and presuppositional meaning.

⁵ Burrill & Bonsack (1962) propose a conceptual category—the *topocomplex*—which accounts for semantic and cultural properties of toponyms. As a combination of geographic and linguistic phenomena, a topocomplex is a “a geographic entity of topographic scale made up of more than one discrete and separably nameable element but identifiable by a single term or toponym” (Burrill 1991, 186).

⁶ During the Viet Nam War, main names like *Hùng* ‘hero/heroism’, *Cường* ‘vigour’, *Dũng* ‘bravery’, *Chiến* ‘fight’, *Thắng* ‘win’ and *Bình* ‘peace’, etc., were very popular, especially in the north of the country. These represented the unswerving determination of Vietnamese people in the war of liberation and their ultimate desire for peace for the country ravaged by war.

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