

# Proper Names in Phraseme Constructions

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the roles of proper names (PNs) in phraseological constructions (PhCs), focusing on their semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions. PNs serve referential, metaphorical, and symbolic functions, enriched by cultural specificity and pragmatic effects. The research highlights semantic constraints in slot-filling and explores variability in name forms. Findings emphasize PNs' unique contribution to the expressive power of PhCs, offering insights for linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic analysis.

**Keywords:** phraseme constructions; proper names.

## 1. Introduction

Phraseme constructions (PhCs), also referred to as phraseological constructions, syntactic phrasemes, or syntactic idioms, represent a category of phraseological units identified by a specific structure (Dobrovol'skij, 2011, 114, 2012, 328; Fleischer, 1997, 130–134; Mel'čuk, 2021, 2023; Mellado Blanco, Mollica and Schafroth, 2022, 1; Pavlova and Alekseyeva, 2022, 54; Pavlova, 2024, 197–198). These lexically open phraseme constructions are made up of a fixed and entrenched syntactic structure and slots that can be filled with lexemes or phrase components (allowing for flexibility in text production). As an example, consider the syntactic phrasemes:

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of close collaboration between the two authors, whose names appear in alphabetical order. For academic attribution only, Paola Cotta Ramusino is responsible for Sections 1, 3, 4.1.1, 4.2 and Anna Pavlova for sections 1.1, 2, 4, 4.1.2. Section 5 (Conclusions) was jointly authored.

- N V what N V  
e.g.: *I said what I said; He sees what he sees;*
- that N of a N  
e.g.: *that rascal of a boy; that scoundrel of a husband*

The words *what*, *that*, and *of* act as anchors, while N and V represent slots that can be filled with different words (N – nouns, V – verbs) in a relatively adaptable way during text production. These PhCs hold a distinct meaning as a pattern.

The slots are filled according to specific morphological and semantic rules. Some patterns admit the use of different parts of speech as fillers, whereas others allow only certain parts of speech as fillers: some slots allow nouns and verbs (e.g. *N V what N V*), others only nouns (e.g. *that N of an N*).

### 1.1 A brief state of the art

The concept of syntactically fixed but lexically open schemata has been a subject of inquiry for a significant period, with considerable diversity not only in terms of terminology but also in terms of the research focus. The initial attempts to investigate and describe PhCs can be traced back to Soviet phraseology research. Natalija Švedova (1960, 269–279) was likely the first to describe this linguistic phenomenon using the term “phraseologised constructions” (in Russian, “frazelogizirovannye postroenija”), thus drawing attention to their existence in the Russian language. Ten years later, in her work *Grammar of the modern Russian literary language* (in Russian, *Grammatika sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo jazyka*), she elaborated on various aspects of the syntax for certain PhCs, which she referred to as “phraseologised structural schemata” (in Russian, “frazelogizirovannye strukturnye shemy”) (Švedova, 1970).

Subsequently, PhCs were incorporated into Russian phraseology research under different terms, such as “phraseoschemata” (in Russian, “frazeoshemy”) by Dmitrij Šmelëv (1977, 327–330), “syntactic phraseologisms” (in Russian, “sintaksičeskije frazeologizmy”), and “phraseologised sentences” (in Russian, “predloženiya frazeologizirovannoj struktury”) by Alla Veličko (Veličko, 1996, 2016), “phraseme-constructions” (in Russian, “frazelogizmy-konstrukcii”) by Dmitrij Dobrovolskij (2011, 2016), “syntactic phrasemes” (in Russian, “sintaksičeskije phrasemy”) by Leonid Iomdin (2010) within the context of his studies on microsyntax, and by other linguists.

From the point of view of Construction Grammar, a construction is any conventionalized form-meaning pair. In his seminal work, Charles Fillmore defined a syntactic idiom as a phrase or construction whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of its individual parts. Rather, it must be learned as a whole. Fillmore proposed that syntactic idioms are a significant aspect

of language that should be studied alongside traditional syntactic structures (Fillmore, 1988; Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor, 1988; Kay and Fillmore, 1999).

In her seminal 1995 work, Adele Goldberg develops a constructional approach to argument structure, demonstrating that constructions are meaningful form-meaning pairings that actively contribute to sentence interpretation beyond the lexical items they contain. She argues that constructions are the fundamental units of grammar, rather than individual words or abstract rules. In her subsequent works (2006, 2013), Goldberg explores the role of constructions in language use and acquisition, focusing on how speakers generalize usage patterns from specific instances. She posits that constructions form the building blocks of language, acquired through exposure to language use.

In recent years research on PhCs has been going on in different languages and inter-linguistically, especially in the CxG theoretical frame (cf. Dobrovolskij, 2011, 114–119, 2016, 10–14, 2018, 11–12; Finkbeiner, 2021, 2022; Janda *et al.*, 2020; Mellado Blanco, 2022; Schafroth, 2023; Steyer, 2013, 25–32; Ziem, 2014, 2018). As the number of PhCs under study continues to grow, the methodology for their description is also undergoing a period of development. It is usually not sufficient to merely discuss verbs, nouns, or adjectives as potential slot-fillers. In a number of instances, it is necessary to identify particular semantic or grammatical categories of words that would be permitted, as opposed to those that would not be permitted, for the purpose of slot-filling. For instance, only animate nouns may serve as slot-fillers, or only masculine (but not feminine), singular (but not plural), and so on. Word class is not the appropriate level at which a researcher of PhCs should stop, if the goal is to describe a construction in a way that enables its accurate and active use by language learners and translators. For the creation of an active-type dictionary, it is essential to continuously examine the limits of our freedom in slot filling, approach these limits, and see what would happen if these limits were exceeded. These limits can be both of a morphological and a semantic or pragmatic nature.

## 2. The COST Project

An international group of approximately 100 scholars is currently developing two similarly structured online dictionaries of phraseological constructions (PhCs), hosted on the GitHub platform. One is a Russian-German dictionary, and the other is a German multilingual dictionary with Russian, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Croatian, Hungarian (and others) as target languages from Eastern and Central European regions. Each dictionary aims to capture and describe about 300 PhCs.

Each PhC is treated as a lemma and described from a holistic perspective, encompassing semantics and pragmatics, morphology, syntax, and phonetics (including prosody). Every entry is accompanied by textual examples illustrating

usage, register, style, synonyms, homonyms, and paronyms. Examples of PhCs in the original language are derived from a variety of textual sources, including but not limited to: text corpora, journalistic and literary texts, blogs and social networks, films and series, videos and oral everyday dialogues or video interviews. An integral component of the dictionary article is a table presenting additional examples and their (preferably) published translations in target languages. A commentary is provided by the respective dictionary article author for each translation.

In addition, each target language is accompanied by a set of general observations and practical recommendations for translators. Most translation examples are drawn from parallel text corpora, while others come from translated books and journalistic texts that also function as parallel sources.

A distinctive feature of this project – consistent with the core tenets of Construction Grammar, which underpins our approach – is that no distinction is made between the semantics and pragmatics of PhC patterns. Pragmatics is closely intertwined with semantics to the extent that they can hardly be distinguished. From our perspective, they should not be separated. In the “Meaning” section of the dictionary article, both semantic and pragmatic aspects of the corresponding lemma are described.

The aim is to create a PhC dictionary of an active type for both scientific and didactic purposes: foreign language learners and translators should be empowered by the dictionary articles to not only passively recognize and understand the corresponding PhCs in the text but also to use them in their own texts.

Our primary goal is to highlight the importance of a detailed description of slot-filling, in order to move beyond ‘word class’ as the default measure for identifying possible fillers, both in morphological and semantic terms.

The present paper is thus a part of the aforementioned project and aims to examine the function of proper names in phraseme constructions employed as slot fillers. To our knowledge, no studies on proper names in PhC research have been published to date. This topic is closely related to other areas of research, including individual reference, metaphor and cultural specificity dimensions.

The present study is limited to an examination of the names of living beings, with a particular focus on anthroponyms – first names, hypocoristic forms, last names and also patronymics, the latter of which is a distinctive feature of Russian culture: the patronymic follows the first name and, together with the first name, forms a polite full form of addressing an adult person.

We will use PhCs from the Russian-German dictionary as our material, focusing only on the Russian examples. Translation aspects will not be addressed in this article.

For the purposes of this study, we do not aim to provide in-depth analyses of individual phraseme constructions. Detailed discussions of meaning, morphology, possible synonyms, and related features of specific PhCs – such as

those found in dictionary entries – are beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we present a selection of key features for each construction, offering concrete examples representative of broader classes. Our focus lies on the use and function of proper names, and we propose criteria for classifying PhCs based on proper names as slot fillers.

As this is not a corpus-based study, we do not engage with the issue of frequency in detail. However, we do offer a number of observations and provide some empirical evidence where relevant.

### 3. A brief profile of Proper Names (PNs)

A linguistic universal category (Hockett, 1958, 311–313), PNs have been discussed in many disciplines other than linguistics. However, their function and status have been investigated on a theoretical level by many linguists (cf. Pierini, 2008 for a brief overview of the state of the art). The referential function is arguably the most apparent, although it is not necessarily the most significant; indeed, it often contributes little to the description or meaning of the individual (O’Rourke and Diego Balaguer, 2020). They are similar to deictics in that they identify a referent, but they differ from them in that they are not dependent on situational context (Lyons, 1977, 214; Van Langendonck, 2007, 169–171; Pierini, 2008, 44). As with nouns, they are an open category, exhibiting a number of grammatical features (such as the plural and gender, as well as inflection in Russian), as well as derivational morphology (e.g. hypocoristic forms). They lack lexical meaning, and according to Lyons, they lack meaning *tout-court*: “It is widely, though not universally, accepted that proper names do not have sense” (Lyons, 1977, 198), although this is less and less accepted: in a cognitive approach<sup>2</sup>, it has become clear that the reference of PNs to their referents is not direct; rather, a PN refers to the mental image of the referent in our consciousness. As the number of individuals who are aware of a particular referent increases, so too does the extent of their conceptualization of that person. Furthermore, the activation of associations in consciousness is enhanced when the sound of a proper name is heard. “In contrast to common names, the connotative meaning of a proper name is richer, indicating the distinction between a proper name and a common name at both the conceptual and referential levels” (Fonjakova, 1990, 23).

In addition to their denotative function, they may also yield a connotational one by selecting certain properties pertaining to an individual referent or encyclopedic knowledge about it. Thanks to their connotational level, PNs also

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2 The cognitive processing of PNs may differ from the processing of general language. There is evidence suggesting that PNs are processed in a distinct mental mechanism (Aleksieieva, 2021; O’Rourke and Diego Balaguer, 2020; Reszegi, 2023).

develop a metaphorical function, allowing them to convey abstract or figurative meanings that extend beyond their direct referential function (Brozović and Žic Fuchs, 2005; Jeshion, 2015). The metaphorical usage of a name may be context-dependent and may involve associations with the qualities or characteristics typically associated with the person bearing that name. If the connotative potential has a national or local character, its decoding relies mainly on shared knowledge (Dobrovolskij and Piirainen, 2005, 245–247).

On this basis, PNs demonstrate a capacity for diachronic motivation, as evidenced by the persistence of cultural, linguistic, social, geographic, and ethnic identity markers. PNs frequently encompass cultural nuances and are interwoven with cultural references, reflecting naming conventions, traditions, and historical or social significance within a particular culture (Corazza, 2017, 2021; Szerszunowicz, 2017). Indeed, PNs possess a multitude of connotative meanings and serve as cultural identifiers of texts (Sato, 2016, 1). This is particularly noteworthy in the context of phraseological units, which best exemplify the interrelationship between language and culture. Thus, the use of PNs in PhCs can result in the creation of expressions that hold cultural, historical, or contextual significance.

#### 4. Function of PNs in the PhCs

In the preceding section, we defined two key functions of PNs: the referential-denotative and the metaphorical. With regard to the referential-denotative function, PNs are not confined to denoting individual, specific, concrete entities; rather, they may also be used to refer to entire groups of referents sharing the same designation, particularly in the case of people. For instance, a group of individuals bearing the first name *Naum* or *Miriam* may be referred to as *Naums* or *Miriams*, respectively. Proper names may at times function purely as formal designations, devoid of descriptive content. To provide an illustration, when a young mother is selecting a name for her newborn daughter, she may state, “Irina appeals to me.” (cf. the “polyreferential view” in Delgado, 2019).

Moreover, given that PNs are capable of encapsulating entire concepts that extend beyond their denotative function, it is possible for many of them to become generic symbolic names due to their connotational aura. Indeed, a considerable number of onyms possess a potential for connotation, which has been actualized over time through the process of anthonomasia. This process is usually not instantaneous but requires a considerable period of time. The concepts behind PNs can become increasingly known as, for example, the corresponding referent becomes more widely known and popular. As more people associate a particular proper name with certain characteristics, the number of individuals with similar conceptual knowledge grows. For example, many people, regardless of their native languages, know that the Greek philosopher Socrates was

known as very wise, thus, it takes only a small step to compare a wise person to Socrates and metaphorically refer to them as (a) Socrates.

However, many PN metaphors, via anthonomasia, are culture-specific. For instance, every Russian speaker would likely understand what qualities might be implied by the PN metaphor ‘Ostap Bender’ (cleverness, resourcefulness, creativity in matters of deceit). Still, this metaphor remains meaningless for people belonging to other cultures, as the popularity of the novels *Zolotoj telënok* (“The Golden Calf”) and *Dvenadcat’ stul’ev* (“The twelve chairs”) by Ilja Il’f and Evgenij Petrov, featuring the main character Ostap Bender, is incomparably higher in Russia than in any other country or culture.

PNs can also evolve into generic nouns on a metonymic basis: the proper name is transferred to the residents, employees, or the corresponding entity. Proper names of poets are often transferred to their works, for example, the question “Do you know Kafka?” actually means “Do you know the works of Kafka?” In our classification, we do not differentiate between metaphorical and metonymic use of PNs: the main thing is that the proper name is used in the function of a generic name.

Besides, proper names can be used in additional and very specific functions depending on the particular phraseological construction.

The following subsections present a comprehensive typology of the possible functions that PNs may fulfil in PhCs.

## 4.1 Referential use

### 4.1.1 Context-dependent PNs

–  $X_1$  на  $X_1$  loc

e.g. *Вор на воре* (lit. A thief upon a thief) / *Колдобина на колдобине* (lit. A bump upon a bump) / *Мошенник на мошеннике сидит и мошенником погоняет* (lit. A swindler sits on another swindler and calls him a swindler) / *Таня на Тане* (lit. Tanja upon Tanja)

(1) У моей сестры в классе было 9 Тань. Таня на Тане.

Lit. In my sister’s class there were 9 Tanjas. Tanja upon Tanja.

‘My sister had 9 girls named Tanja in her class. It was Tanjas everywhere!’<sup>3</sup>

In this PhC, which denotes a considerable quantity of a given entity (for instance in the class there are a lot of schoolgirls named Tanja), the PNs are employed as identifiers for individual persons or animals, thus providing a unique reference for each. The deictic and referential function is dependent on the situational context.

3 Here and in the following examples, the English equivalents may be somewhat unsatisfactory or appear inaccurate; however, this is largely due to a lack of true equivalence in most cases.

– И не кто-нибудь, а X

(2) Мне помогли. И не кто-нибудь, а мой коллега Ива́шин.  
‘They helped me. And not just anyone, but my colleague Ivašin’.

This PhC emphasizes the importance of X in contrast to all other members of the same referential class, generalized by the indefinite pronoun *-нибудь* (‘any’). These other members are portrayed in a pejorative or contemptuous manner, as if unworthy of comparison with the referent X, who thereby acquires specific and individualized referentiality. That is the reason why PNs often occur in this PhC as concrete singular reference. For example:

(3) Вера обручилась. И не с кем-нибудь, а с Константином Меладзе.  
‘Vera got engaged. And not just with anyone, but with Konstantin Meladze’.

– Я тебе/вам не N (‘a N’)!

(4) Я тебе не Настя, а Настасья Викторовна!  
‘To you, I am not Nastja, but Nastas’ja Viktorovna!’

This PhC is frequently employed as a negative reaction to a verbal stimulus, as below:

(5) Я тебе не такси!  
‘I am not your taxi!’

as a response to a request for a ride. Evaluative semantics predominates when, in the preceding context, the speaker is asked to act against their beliefs, for example:

(6) Я тебе не доносчик!  
‘I’m not an informer for you!’

as a response to a request to talk about the behavior of a third person.

This PhC can be used to express refusal in a variety of contexts. It may serve to reject a specific action, protest against a demand or proposal, or signal unwillingness to continue a conversation in which the interlocutor attempts to dictate the terms. At its core, it conveys a refusal to perform a particular action. The use of PNs typically conveys a slight shift in meaning and pragmatic significance. It indicates to the interlocutor that they are dissatisfied with the form

of address or the way in which their name is pronounced by the interlocutor. As in example (4), where the speaker intends to re-establish a certain degree of distance with the interlocutor, typically by indicating that they do not accept a familiar or overly casual mode of address.

The PN can also be employed in this PhC in a metaphorical sense, thanks to *anthonomasia*. In this case, the proper name is understood as a generic designation for a specific type of person or object, or alternatively, as a collective name for a complex of properties. For instance:

(7) Я тебе не Мата Хари!  
 ‘I’m not Mata Hari for you!’  
 (Meaning: ‘I am not a spy’).

– (а/ну,) вот и N!

(8) А вот и Виктор!  
 ‘There’s Viktor finally!’

This PhC states the appearance in the field of vision of a certain object N (usually long-awaited and anticipated) or the establishment of the fact of the presence of this object in proximity to the perceiver through auditory or other sensory sensations. The phrase construct draws the interlocutor’s attention to the named filler object and (usually) suggests joy at seeing this object, either for the speaker or the listener. Even if the phrase’s addressee did not expect to see anyone or anything, the phrase construct conveys the idea that N is someone or something long-awaited and even eagerly anticipated. In other words, the phrase construct has a suggestive effect.

#### 4.1.2 Descriptive use: salient attribute or property of the referent of the name are referred to

– Это вам/тебе не X  
 ‘to/for you it is not X’

(9) Это тебе не Марья Геннадьевна.  
 ‘With this person something would be more difficult (or easier) than with Mar’ja Gennad’jevna’.

This PhC also functions as a presuppositional trigger: the communication partner should know Mar'ja Gennad'evna's character or her special qualities, which are hinted at here.

- Как X, так Y [а как X', так Y']  
 'as soon as X, then Y [but when X', Y']

There can be different combinations of X and Y: firstly, both elements may be a common noun (*Как еврей, так со скрипкой* 'If it's a Jew, then with a violin'), second, a phrase (*Как деньги нужны, так «мамочка», а как помочь, так уже исчез* 'When they need money, it's 'Mommy,' but when it's time to help, they've already disappeared'), thirdly an infinitive verb (*Как убирать, так сразу Таня* 'When it's time to clean, it's always Tanja's job').

As filler Y, a proper name can certainly be used, but in the role of the first filler (X) it is rather unlikely. Only in very specific contexts can a proper name be used, e.g.: *Как Таня, так замужем* 'As soon as I meet a woman called Tanja, she is always already married'.

- всем N' <sup>dat pl</sup> N' <sup>nom sg</sup>

e.g. *Всем учителям учитель*  
 'The best teacher (of all teachers)'

This PhC indicates that the individual in question is regarded as exemplary or distinguished within their respective field, even when compared to other professionals in the same category. From an illocutionary perspective, it can be defined as a compliment conveying a positive assessment.

In this PhC PNs are used as identifiers for groups of persons with the same name (group, non-individual reference):

- (10) *Всем Маринам Марина!*  
 'The best Marina of all Marinas'

If the filler is a PN, the construction implies that a person with that name is better or excels in some criterion among people with the same name. Of course, in this case, the construction is merely a figure of speech: its hyperbolic nature is evident, as is the playful, humorous effect, since the criterion 'name' for grouping people into one category is artificial, deliberate, and humorous against the semantics of this phraseological construction.

- N<sub>gen</sub> НАМ ТОЛЬКО НЕ ХВАТАЛО!  
 ‘That’s all we needed!’ (ironic)

This construction is used when the speaker anticipates a highly unfavorable potential outcome. It also appears in dialogue as an objection or an expression of annoyance, typically directed either at the interlocutor or a third party. It conveys that something already said or done is problematic – but that things could get even worse, namely N. Alternatively, it may indicate that what has just occurred is already undesirable, and that the suggestion made by the interlocutor or a third party would only worsen the circumstances. The construction is expressive and charged with palpable negativity. ЭТОГО НАМ ТОЛЬКО НЕ ХВАТАЛО! (‘That’s all we needed!’) is an ironic phrase with a clearly negative evaluative tone. It conveys that a difficult or unpleasant context is made even more burdensome by an additional complication, signaling strong disapproval or irritation.

- (11) ИЛЬИ НАМ ТОЛЬКО НЕ ХВАТАЛО!  
 ‘Il’ja – that’s all we needed!’

In instances where a proper name occupies the slot, it may be employed to refer to a person, as illustrated in (11). It would be preferable for the speaker if the specific individual, identified as Il’ja, were not in this situation. Nevertheless, a proper name may also be employed to refer to the entity itself, that is to say, solely the name itself, without any additional qualifiers. To illustrate, one might posit that “*Ильи нам только в семье не хватало!*” The grandmother states, ‘We only lacked an Il’ja in the family!’ at a time when the entire family is engaged in the process of selecting a name for the newborn. It is evident that the aforementioned utterance does not pertain to the newborn infant, who has not yet been assigned a name. Instead, it is a reference to the name *Il’ja*, which the grandmother in question has expressed discontent with for reasons that are not entirely clear.

- ЕСТЬ N’ И N’

- (12) ЕСТЬ ПИСАТЕЛИ И ПИСАТЕЛИ  
 ‘There are writers and writers’

This construction signifies that not all objects that are logically associated with a particular class are identical. The common noun designates the object as a representative of the entire category of similar objects that share a single class due to the coincidence of their essential features. The potential identity of members of this set, which is denied in the construct, is emphasized using

identical forms of the recurrent noun filler. The construction suggests that even when two or more objects or phenomena share the same name, they are not entirely identical.

This construct implies, among other things, that a common noun has both non-referential and referential uses, and that there may be a kind of conflict between these uses.

PNs appear to be unsuitable as fillers in this particular phatic construction. Moreover, it is generally accepted that only countable nouns can fulfil this role. In this construction, both fillers typically refer to two members of a specifically named set. It is claimed that the elements of the set do not necessarily have to be completely identical. However, examples demonstrate that abstract, uncountable nouns can also act as fillers (for instance, ‘There is evil and evil’), as well as proper names – the latter in very specific meanings, typically atypical for proper names:

(13) ЕСТЬ МИХАЛКОВЫ И МИХАЛКОВЫ.

‘There are Michalkovs and Michalkovs.’

The proper name as a filler (N<sup>1</sup>) can perform two specific functions. If the filler is used in the plural and implies general reference (for example, ‘There are Tanjas and Tanjas’), the construction signifies that individuals with disparate characteristics may be referred to by the name Tanja. In instances where specific referents are intended, as in (13), the construction indicates that the concrete representatives of the family bearing this surname are dissimilar to each other.

When used in the singular with an individual-specific reference, the phrase may signify that the referent exhibits disparate behaviours or actions in varying contexts. Alternatively, it may indicate that the same person can be perceived in different ways at different stages of their life and work. E. g.:

(14) ЕСТЬ МИХАЛКОВ И МИХАЛКОВ: МИХАЛКОВ ВРЕМЁН ФИЛЬМА «ПЯТЬ ВЕЧЕРОВ» И МИХАЛКОВ ВРЕМЁН ФИЛЬМА «СИБИРСКИЙ ЦИРЮЛЬНИК». И ЭТО СЛОВНО БЫ ДВА РАЗНЫХ РЕЖИССЁРА.

‘There is Michalkov and Michalkov. There is Michalkov the director of *Five Evenings* and that of *Siberian Barber*. As if they were two different film directors.’

– N<sup>1</sup> БОЛЬШЕ, N<sup>1</sup> МЕНЬШЕ

(15) Морщинкой больше, морщинкой меньше, какая разница?

‘A wrinkle more, a wrinkle less, what difference does it make?’

This PhC expresses indifference: the exact number of referents of the filler N' does not matter (only for this specific situation or generally, always). In most cases, an explicit commentary on the same illocutionary force of irrelevance or indifference appears in the right-hand context, and less frequently in the left. Typical examples include: “What’s the difference?”, “What does it change?”, or “Who cares?” “Who is interested in this?”; ‘Who is worried about it?’; “Big deal!”, “It doesn’t matter”. Such a comment enhances the meaning of the construction. However, the filler is self-sufficient, so the construction is often used without such additions in the context: the idea of irrelevance already arises from it alone. One of the most frequent constructions is the anaphoric phrase ‘One more, one less’.

Though not frequently, one can find PNs in this construction e.g. *Васей больше, Васей меньше* ‘One Vasilij more, one Vasilij less’, implying either the name ‘Vasilij’ itself (for example, there are already seven people named Vasilij in the room, the eighth doesn’t count), or the speaker uses a linguistic play effect, designating a person by their name as if it were a common noun. Thus, it usually emphasizes a sense of contempt towards that specific person named Vasilij.

#### 4.2 Figurative use: metaphors, metonymies, similes, hyperboles

– N (из Pron<sub>Gen</sub>) ещё тот/та/те!

(16) Хозяйка из меня ещё та!

‘I am not a good housewife’

This PhC provides a critical evaluation, indicating that the assessed subject fails to meet the established criteria or expectations for objects of this class. Both inanimate objects and living beings can be the subject of evaluation. However, it is observed that fillers, which are referents of living beings, occur with greater frequency.

In this PhC PNs are employed exclusively in a metaphorical or metonymic capacity:

(17) Шекспир из него ещё тот.

‘His poetry is not that of Shakespeare’

One can imagine proper names in the role of fillers only in the names of roles (metonymy): *Татьяна из неё ещё та!* ‘She plays Tat’jana, well, so and so’; *Онегин из него ещё тот!* ‘He plays Onegin, well, so and so’: someone is trying to portray (in a movie, on stage) characters from well-known literary works or historical personalities. Similar things could be said about someone who tries their luck in painting, poetry, sports, and other enjoyable hobbies of life, e. g.:

*Шекспир из него ещё тот* ‘His poetry is not that of Shakespeare’ or *Модильяни из него ещё тот* ‘His painting falls miles short of Modigliani (He’s far from being a real Modigliani – though he clearly thinks he is).’

– Это ли не X?

(18) Это ли не подло?  
‘Isn’t that just mean?’

This PhC conveys an evaluative stance that the speaker invites the listener to consider and potentially align with. Simultaneously, it performs an act of suggestion, exerting a subtle persuasive force. Typically, the construction follows a brief narrative or situation, which the speaker then assesses while implicitly seeking the listener’s agreement or reaction. It often takes the form of a rhetorical question or dramatic exclamation, lending the utterance a heightened emotional tone. Therefore, PNs may be employed as slot fillers, either metaphorically or metonymically, provided that the filler is understood to carry an evaluative meaning. To illustrate, consider the following example:

(19) Это ли не король Лир?  
‘Isn’t that just like King Lear?’

The phrase “Isn’t this just like King Lear?” implies a comparison with the behaviour or situation of King Lear, suggesting a sense of dramatic or tragic irony. The phrase conveys the idea that the person’s actions or circumstances are similar to those of King Lear, particularly in terms of generosity, ingratitude or misfortune.

– Тоже мне, N!  
N, indeed!

(20) Тоже мне адвокат!  
‘What a lawyer!’

This PhC expresses disapproval, criticism, or distrust towards a second or third person — primarily regarding their claims to a specific social role, professionalism, acknowledgement of competence in a particular field, or rights to do or say something (for example, lecturing someone).

(20) can be said to a person who is a lawyer, and in this case, the assessment is directed at their professional activity: ‘a bad, useless lawyer’. However, the same phrase can be uttered towards someone who, for instance, is defending

another person without being a lawyer. In this case, the person is metaphorically assessed as a ‘lawyer’ with mockery and disrespect. The evaluation, once again, is negative.

In the role of fillers, PNs can also be used, but only metaphorically, for example:

(21a) Тоже мне, Цицерон!  
‘Cicero, indeed’

Or directed at a person who has just delivered an impassioned speech:

(21b) Тоже мне, Грета Гарбо!  
‘Greta Garbo, indeed!’

(Meaning: ‘So, are you trying to play Cicero/Greta Garbo here? If yes, your playing is bad’).

This PhC, if used with proper names – often those of literary characters or well-known figures – serves to highlight the evident mismatch between a person’s portrayal and the qualities of the named referent, or to signal the inappropriateness of a particular action in the given context (Baranov and Dobrovol’skij, 2024, 178).

– N ОТДЫХАЕТ!  
N is resting!

(22) Гёте ОТДЫХАЕТ!  
‘Goethe is resting’  
(meaning: ‘Goethe cannot hold a candle to you’).

This construction, which occurs with high frequency and almost exclusively with PNs, expresses strong appreciation for someone’s talent, professionalism, or the exceptional quality of a result. The praise is conveyed through an indirect comparison with a well-known personality, whose name simultaneously reflects the speaker’s evaluation of that figure and invokes their widely recognized abilities. For example, (22) implies that someone writes better poetry than Goethe himself – used here as a benchmark for poetic excellence. Occasionally, the slot may also be filled with a generic label (e.g., *Античные философы отдыхают* ‘Even the Ancient Philosophers couldn’t compete with you’), though PNs remain the more typical choice in this PhC.

The comparison is made in favor of the compared element: the anchor-verb *rests* here means ‘cannot serve as a basis for comparison’. The construction functions as a rhetorical figure, marked by imagery and hyperbole. PNs are often used as fillers with a metaphorical function, and the entire phraseological construction itself can also be interpreted as a metaphor.

An interesting aspect is the referential nature of the filler noun: it reflects both specific-individual and general referential assignment. For instance, the name *Stanislavskij* in the construction *Stanislavskij is taking a rest!* simultaneously refers to the concrete historical figure Konstantin Stanislavskij and evokes associations related to him (in this case, the “Stanislavskij system”, the theory of the actor’s full immersion into the character being portrayed on stage), while at the same time functions in its metaphorical meaning – ‘any very talented person who understands theatrical art and can transform into a role’, thus fulfilling the role of general reference.

The semantics and pragmatics of this construction rely on a complex interplay between direct reference and figurative meaning, which makes such expressions powerful tools of discursive influence. Thus, the construction demonstrates how a concrete, real-world referent can be used as a tool for metaphorical disparagement, which, in turn, serves as a powerful means of glorifying another, unnamed subject in the phraseological construction. This linguistic mechanism makes it a valuable object of study within the frameworks of phraseology, pragmatics, referential theory, and onomastics.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This study has examined the functions and roles of PNs within phraseological constructions (PhCs), emphasizing their semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions. The PN serves as a semantic and pragmatic component of particular significance, and its role in such constructions reveals several noteworthy features. While the referential function may appear primary, it is not the most relevant unless integrated with denotative, connotative, and symbolic dimensions. It is clear that the semantics of PNs imposes certain constraints, and not all phraseme constructions permit fillers of this type. The analysis highlights the distinctive value of PNs as slot fillers in PhCs, demonstrating their capacity to convey referential and metaphorical meanings that go beyond those of generic nouns. The main findings are summarized below.

1. **Referential and Context-Dependent Use** – PNs in PhCs often perform a referential function, identifying specific individuals or groups while reflecting situational or contextual relevance. Examples illustrate how PNs establish a sense of individuality, such as emphasizing unique traits or re-establishing relational boundaries.

2. **Metaphorical and Connotational Use** – Many PhCs leverage the symbolic and cultural connotations of proper names to express abstract or figurative meanings. For instance, names of well-known figures or characters are used metaphorically to convey certain traits or evoke cultural associations, often serving as a shortcut to complex ideas.
3. **Cultural Specificity** – The metaphorical use of proper names often reflects cultural nuances, with the interpretative value of a PN depending on the shared knowledge within a cultural or linguistic community. Certain names carry connotations that are accessible only to individuals familiar with specific cultural or historical contexts.
4. **Pragmatic Implications** – The use of proper names in PhCs can introduce specific pragmatic effects, such as irony, humor, or emphasis, it can also be used to re-establish relational distances.
5. **Semantic Constraints** – The inclusion of PNs as fillers in PhCs entails both semantic and pragmatic constraints, as not all constructions are compatible with this type of filler. The study identifies several typologies and classification criteria, including distinctions between referential and metaphorical uses, as well as between individual and collective referents.
6. **Variability in Name Forms** – The study also discusses the potential for classifying PhCs based on the form of the name used (e.g., first name, full name, nickname) or the frequency of name repetition within a construction. These classifications reveal further layers of complexity in the interaction between PNs and phraseological patterns.

This research underscores the multifunctionality of PNs in PhCs and their capacity to enrich the expressive potential of language. By exploring the interplay between semantics, pragmatics, and cultural specificity, the study provides a foundation for further investigations into the role of PNs across different languages and phraseological contexts.

These findings not only refine the semantic categorization of PhCs involving PNs but also point to promising directions for future research. Upcoming studies could investigate the interaction between these constructions and cognitive salience or narrative framing, particularly in multilingual settings. In applied linguistics, our classification may serve as a valuable tool for teaching pragmatic competence in L2 instruction, illustrating how proper names can evoke culturally shared scripts and stereotypes. Finally, cross-cultural investigations might explore whether—and how—similar constructions arise in other languages, especially those with different conventions surrounding name usage or referential humor.

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