Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

Summary of Doctoral Thesis

ESZTER SZTRÁKOS

Name Giving in Hungarian Painting

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1. Topic and goal of the dissertation

1.1. My thesis is about the naming conventions of Hungarian paintings. Researches on titles generally belong to the science of onomastics and to the literature, but since it is an interdisciplinary area, it brings up relevant questions for e.g. art history and for other areas of linguistics (sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive researches, psycho-linguistics).

The research of the naming conventions has always belonged to the less notable areas of linguistics, and there have been only a few studies published in this topic, which primarily discuss titles from a syntactical perspective, and focus on the subject of titles in publications and in literature. Naming convention in visual arts has been only briefly mentioned in the national and international scientific literature that I am aware of.

In the degree I aim at giving a full picture of the naming conventions in visual arts, both from the perspective of the audience and the artists, and through this I would like to call the attention to the role of the work of art titles. To achieve this I used methodologies from several scientific fields including pedagogy because the thesis also has pedagogic-methodological perspectives. My paper centres around the painting titles as a special area within the naming conventions in visual arts, since this is the area where the characteristics and tendencies in naming can be tracked down.

1.2. The study of titles as other names belongs to the less researched areas of onomastics since titles are not typical proper names. The relevant specialized literature mention the question of titles but the motivations behind the naming conventions have not been examined yet. In relation to linguistics, works were published mainly about the titles of written texts (e.g. J. SOLTÉSZ 1965, KOVALOVSZKY 1974, EŐRY 1989, KEMÉNY 1989, TOLCSVAI 2001, PAPP 2002, BANCZEROWSKI 2009); about lyrical titles (e.g. RICOEUR 2006, G. PAPP 2012) and some have already examined the titles of movies (e.g. CS. JÓNÁS 2002, VERMES 2005, CSANÁLOSI 2011), which seem to be similar to the titles in fine arts but a separate study has not been published in this topic in Hungary.

The topic has been briefly mentioned in the specialized literature of the international onomastics (e.g. BRENDLER 2004, VAN LANGENDONCK 2008) and it has rather been

studied as part of art psychology within art history (e.g. BUTOR 1986, KANDINSZKIJ 1987, KEPES 1979, ARNHEIM 2004).

1.3. My own pragmatic research regarding the questions of naming is made up of three parts. Both the corpus and the method are different in the individual parts. In the first part, I give an overview of the history of naming conventions and its characteristics in the different eras through the examination of the representative painting titles in the Hungarian National Gallery based on the catalogue of the institution. In the second part, demonstrating the viewpoint of the artists, I present the motivations behind the title choices with interviews with contemporary Hungarian artists. In the third part, demonstrating the viewpoint of the audience, I point out the issues around naming and the titles through a research for which I used questionnaires completed by school children.

2. Structure of the dissertation

2.1. In the introduction I give an overview of the purpose and antecedents of the thesis, I describe the researches, the corpus and the method.

2.2. In the second part I deal with titles generally: first I present the general linguistic problems about naming, then after briefly touching the history of names I write about the characteristics of titles as proper names, about the possible functions and categories of titles and I mention some issues about translating titles.

Chapter 2.5 in my paper is a special one, independent of the previous basic questions but an interesting one dealing with a topic I found worth to discuss. Translating titles is a source of issues; it is a less consequent and regulated area since it is based on socio-cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, questions are often raised about this topic e.g. what kind of titles should or should not be translated and with which method. To what extent does the translation (or lack of translation) have an influence on the success and the impact of the work?

2.3. The third chapter describes naming conventions as a phenomenon in fine arts, primarily in an art-philosophical approach, raising thought-provoking questions. I used the painting *This is no pipe* from the Belgian surrealist painter Rene Magritte to examine the relations between painting and word and painting and title. The painting from 1929 is a good example of examining and understanding the relations between painting and title. It illustrates that the subject of the painting and the meaning of the work of art are often in discordance among the painters of the era, which can be due to the fact that in the XX. century art painting and title have a special relation.

2.4. The fourth chapter is about the historical examination of characteristics in naming conventions and types of titles. The Hungarian National Gallery gives home to one of the most significant fine arts collections in Hungary, which enables us to have an overview of the history of the works of art. Out of its five collections I examined three which include paintings (Collection of Old Hungarian Masters, Main Painting Collection, Contemporary Collection). After examining the titles of each collection, I aim at describing the formal and semantical features of the collection of titles. My research is based on the data from the National Gallery's system for collection management (MuseumPlus).

2.5. In this chapter I did research the background of the naming when examining the naming conventions from the perspective of the artist. Interviewing contemporary artists is an obvious method for exploring motivations behind the naming since based on the interviews we notice that the act of naming has a different meaning for each artist. The study aims to present the differences and similarities in the naming conventions – as they are reflected in the answers of contemporary artist. For these targeted interviews I primarily visited artists for whom it is important to give names to their paintings and the issue of naming is their concern in theory as well. All of the 30 artists who were asked and shared their thoughts on naming with me are members of the national association of Hungarian artists (MAOE) and represent different areas of art (painter, sculptor, graphic artist).

From the artist interviews we can learn a lot about their opinion about titles. The ars poetica of their naming is close-knit with the ars poetica of their art, so it was often difficult to make a differentiation. The interviews were conducted along the main issues

described below but also giving space to other ideas the artists might have about naming, which shows how colourful and deep this topic is. The questions motivated the artists differently: some responded more to a question, some less, and it is reflected in the response rate in the study. From the paper, we can get to know whether a painting needs a title at all, how a good title looks like, which are the possible sources for naming, and we can have an insight on the naming system of the series of paintings.

2.6. In the chapter titled "Examination of naming at school children", I examine titles from the perspective of school children. The role of titles is undeniably important in literature, in publicism, in music and in fine arts as well. During the pedagogic practice I experienced that school children find it difficult to give a good title to a text or a painting. In MÁRIA LACZKÓ's study titled "Understanding texts based on their titles" (2005), she examined the naming capabilities of school children through tasks of text comprehension. LACZKÓ suggested that if the title is a mean for global cohesion, then the degree of comprehension of the text can be measured by what kind of title it has. The fact that understanding and recalling a read text are strongly linked to the naming capability has already been proven, moreover, the school children who had difficulties with naming are likely to have difficulties with listening comprehension as well. JÁNOS PETŐFI S. and ZSUZSA BENKES approached text and poem illustrations from a semiotic perspective, examining the context between picture and text with school children. (BENKES 1998, PETŐFI S. 1998, PETŐFI S.–BENKES 2002).

In my dissertation I examine the titles given to paintings, which are similar to poem illustrations and can be comprehended as the relation between verbal items and images. The next chapter discusses this issue, the naming conventions of school children. The examination was realised through a questionnaire which was completed by students from the István Gyulai Primary School, in Pesterzsébet, from various classes. The students took part in the research are all residents of Budapest, despite of the fact that the school operates in the outskirt of Budapest.

The questionnaire was filled out anonymously in 3 different age groups, and in 3-3 classes, i.e. in nine classes altogether. 72 second-grade, (8-9 years old), 77 fifth-grade (11-12 years old) and 74 eight-grade (14-15 years old) student participated in the survey, a total of 223 people from both genders. The number of respondents is not the same as the number of answers because the students might have given more possible

answers. The questionnaire made up of five tasks and I am going to describe the tasks with more subheadings.

2.6.1. The purpose of the first task was to see the titles the school children gave to the paintings, to categorise them according to form and semantics, and through this exercise to reveal some general ideas and their frequencies in naming. This reflects the naming capability of students in the research and their extent of capability of seeing the point and association. According to my presupposition, older students are affected by the titles they learnt during their studies, and they are less likely to rely on their fantasy in the task than the younger students. As for the method of representation, it is easier to give title to a realistic painting than to an abstract one.

The task was to give minimum one and maximum 3 titles to paintings representing human figures: I choose Simon Hollósy's *Merengő* and Lajos Tihanyi's *Trisztán Tzara* paintings for this purpose because the first one is a realistic image and second one is an abstract, cubist painting. The task gave opportunity to examine the influence of different styles on the naming. Primarily I examined the form and semantics but sometimes I refer to differences in ages and by gender.

2.6.2. The second task of the questionnaire was a free association research, in which the students were given titles and they had to describe the painting they imagine for that title. The titles belonged to real paintings which I did not disclose to them in the task so as not to influence their imagination. I aim to describe these free associations in the chapter by titles and by age groups and by highlighting the general characteristics. With the examples I wanted to describe the general ideas about the given titles and to show the colourfulness of associations and ways of understanding of school children.

2.6.3. The next task was looking for answers to the question: from 2 given titles which one the school children find better fit to a painting and why. I selected three paintings from the general collection of the Hungarian National Gallery: József Rippl-Rónai, Mihály Munkácsy and Lajos Gulácsy paintings which were made at the end of the XIX. century – and the beginning of the XX. century, representing figures, focussing on one or two men or its details. The given titles were all possible titles which have already appeared in the gallery's database.

2.6.4. In the fourth task, the students had to select from 3 paintings which one belongs to the given title and had to explain their answers. *Morning* and *Still life* were the two titles I gave them.

2.6.5. In the last task of the questionnaire, I gave them 5 paintings of different style and design from the previously mentioned collection. I listed the titles in random order and the task was to find the pairs. With this, I indicated them the interrelationship of title and image and that these two together transmit a message. For the sake of simplicity I choose only one-word titles.

2.7. At the end I summarise the results of the paper and the possible areas for future researches. In the appendices I included the list of specialized literature I used, the list of images and diagrams, and the questionnaire as well as the questions on which my interviews were based.

3. Results

3.1. I present the results in the order of the 3 individual researches. Firstly I describe the results of the examination of titles from the collection of the Hungarian National Gallery.

3.1.1. In the Old Masters Collection we found titles given to the paintings posteriorly, which determines the form and content of titles. The topic of these titles is mainly religious, and its purpose is the easy identification and differentiation. Due to this, the titles are longer and more descriptive than the titles in the other two collections. Since the collection takes up a long period, the artists' journey to self-awareness (and naming their selves) and the need for naming (give titles to their works) were being formulated during this time.

3.1.2. In the Main Painting Collection, I was able to notice general characteristics of the titles from different artists; we often can guess who is the artist based on a category or style of titles, and we can guess the topics which were popular in the era as well. As a consequence of their self-consciousness, almost all painters had a self-portray, and favoured genres are the portrays, historic paintings, still lives, and landscapes. The artistes in this era were keen to represent the countryside, common people, and life

situations, which are reflected in their naming conventions. As for the form, two-word titles are the most commonly given in the collection, and the category of one-word titles are significant as well.

3.1.3. By examining the items of the Contemporary Collection, the people names, colours, and numbers are often used in titles, as well as they used many foreign and slang words. This is the collection out of the three where the characteristics of the naming fashion can be captured the best in the individual, unique title creations and in the cultural references in the titles. From the perspective of form, here the two-word titles are the most common, just like it was in the Painting collection.

3.1.4. From this research, it can be proven that there are major differences in the titles of the three collections, although, these are all paintings. These differences are mainly due to the different eras and tendencies in art and are influenced by the fact whether the artists themselves gave the titles to the pictures or it was done after ages for the sake of identification. The titles are in connection with the topic represented, so we can describe the main categories in the different ages. The titles in the 3 collections have common word-class characteristics, they consist of mainly nouns, which are completed with adverbs or attributives. Verbs are rarely found in the titles, abstract nouns were used to describe deeds and happenings.

3.2. In my second research I examined naming from the perspective of the artist. The research aims to point out and to give answers to questions not discussed yet. Based on the interviews did with contemporary artists, we can have an idea about whether they consider it important to give titles or how can we give good titles. We can learn different approaches but basically each answer emphasises the importance of concise, summarising, easy understanding titles. By understanding their process of and resources for naming, we can understand more their works of art and we can be more conscious about them. The titles for series of paintings have their own system within the system of naming individual pictures. We can get to know the practical issues of naming and its socio-psychological relations, which prove the need for an interdisciplinary approach when examining titles and the process of naming.

3.3. The third research deals with the naming of elementary school children, examining different perspectives. The assessment of their capability of naming, their

understanding and interpretation of titles, their selection of titles and to learn their motivation behind it, and the examination of image associations and the image-title pairs are all subjects of my examination.

The school children have several approaches to naming a text or a painting. We can have an insight on what elements influence the naming. The older they are and the more vocabulary and knowledge they have, the more they adopt known examples, but the styles of the pictures also influenced the respondents irrespective to their age group: they had less difficulties with the realistic paintings than with the abstract ones.

The research aims to point out the promptitude and capabilities they need to have in order to give titles, to receive and understand them. The intellectual readiness, capability of association, empathy, playfulness, intenseness, sensitivity, creativity to produce intellectual content are all features one need to create good titles. These are capabilities which can be developed, so it is recommended also in pedagogy to do some tasks with titles. In the following I discuss the results of the various tasks.

3.3.1. As the result of the first task we can say that in the same way that text titles are influenced by the types of texts, the naming of paintings are influenced by the style and way of representation. By comparing the age groups, and aligned with our presupposition, we can say that due to their growing vocabulary, capability of composition and association older students are more conscious about naming than the younger ones who rather follow their instincts.

As for gender differences, girls tended to transmit more information with their titles so they preferred to give titles of more words. And altogether these titles were more common than the one-word titles, and nouns were the prototypical among the word classes.

I learnt many interesting and mindful associations during the research, which proved that in order to avoid boring/standard titles it is worth to use our imagination, which is exactly what the younger students did. To achieve this, from the picture and our thoughts it invokes our language helps us to create a unity which is comprehendible for everyone.

3.3.2. The second task of the questionnaire was an association exercise in relation to given titles. In terms of comprehending to titles, I could differentiate two approaches: word by word understanding, and understanding of abstract ideas. With this task I

aimed to examine titles as associations of more words, and to assess requirements, so after getting to know the results I was able to identify the categories tied to the 3 painting titles (*Kávéházi jelenet, Madárdal, Aranykor*) according to the 3 age groups.

Basically the task would have resulted in the description of an imaginary picture but it is clear that few students understood the task and they rather have written associations for the titles, and they did not give a description. These associations were influenced by some circumstances: their previous studies and knowledge, actual events, the effect of movie and book reading experiences, etc. They were free to choose the age and the place of the associations – these were also determined by these circumstances – , and that what they wished to highlight from the picture as the mean of representation, e.g. colours, formats, characters or the plot.

3.3.3. The third task raised the question of which title variation was preferred by the school children and why. We learnt from the research that younger children preferred titles which included more details and pieces of information, while the older students choose the shorter, one-word titles. There are only a few differences can be noticed between the genders: boys found shorter titles more attractive, and girls used more often their fantasy. When examining the underlying reasons, I could identify some general schemes, but there were individual associations as well.

3.3.4. In the fourth exercise I examined what kind of pictures the students from various age groups and different genders choose to pair with a given title and they had to explain why. Most of the children choose Adolf Fényes's *Still life with Gingerbread heart* for the title *Morning*, and for the *Still Life* title they choose László Fehér's *Celebration IV.* painting. In both paintings the subjects represented within called their attention. They created obvious and easily identifiable associations for the *Morning* title since the children were aware of the meaning of the word, unlike in the case of the *Still life* title. From the reasons they gave, it turned out that only a few elementary students know the meaning of *still life* (although it is a study material for fourth-grade) and due to this it evoked false associations. From this task, we can also get to know their motivations regardless of previous studies.

3.3.5. In the fifth task (creating picture and title pairs) I concluded the following consequences. My presupposition was partially justified by the result that the older children gave more right answers, but the result of eight-grade boys lags behind that of

the fifth-grade girls. Knowing this, I found some differences by the genders because the girls performed better than the boys.

According to my table summarising the genders, I concluded that girls could solve the task easier, which can refer to the girls' more precise observation and capability of association or their maturity which makes them more open and sensitive to problem solving. Paintings representing unrealistic images caused the most difficulties to the children where it was more difficult to figure out the topic of the picture, so they could hardly find the titles for them.

The research was another evidence of the influencing power of the different ways of representations. Understanding the abstract, non-figurative pictures was more challenging for the recipients and there was no difference in the case of children: some use more, some use less their fantasy. It turned out that it is valid not only for pictures but for titles as well: it was difficult to find the pictures belonging to the symbolic and less concrete titles. So we can state that the painting and the title can lack clarity, which causes uncertainty for the recipient.

3.4. My goal with the paper was to give an overview about the topic, both from the perspective of the artist and the recipient, and to call the attention to the role of naming in fine arts. Through the examination of the painting collections I studied the titles' content and format. The research with the questionnaire examines pedagogical questions also which can be used in pedagogy. As I mentioned before, this area was rarely studied in the national and international specialised literature that I have knowledge of, and so onomastics was brought one step close to the titles of works of art in my paper, and this can give way to possible researches in the future.

This paper was limited to the examination of painting titles and I believe that the examination and comparison of titles from other areas in art would reveal new correlations. It will be worth to examine the historical overview in other collections and in an international context by discussing naming in other countries as well. This topic houses research possibilities not only for onomastics but for other areas in linguistics, for literature, and for art history, too. It can also have a significant role in pedagogy, in the development of capabilities in relation to titles, within the frames of visual culture and text comprehension classes.

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