

***Typowy Janusz* and *Bad Luck Brian*: On meme characters from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective**

Joanna Szerszunowicz

The University of Białystok
joannaszersz@gmail.com

Abstract

*The Poles' observations regarding the reality of the last decades motivated the creation of certain meme characters deeply set in the Polish culture and reflecting the new social phenomena which have come into existence recently. The examples of such persons include the characters named Janusz, Grażyna, Seba and Karyna. Previously, the names had no connotative potential and they were not used as components of idiomatic expressions. In the modern Polish, the names function as labels evoking many features (personality, given intellectual potential, appearance, stereotypical behaviour etc.). For instance, Janusz is a man in his fifties, with a beer belly and reddish face, unattractive, with very limited knowledge in a field in which he himself considers to be an expert, complaining and stressing that life was much better in communist times, wearing unfashionable clothes, putting on sandals and white socks. It is worth adding that because of the connotations, the name is used in the expression *typowy Janusz/janusz* and in the construction *Janusze/janusze* + a discipline/area of activity, e.g. *janusze biznesu*. Both in informal communication and in the journalese discourse, their belonging to labels is of importance – the names evoke complex pictures. As culture-bound items, such units are interesting from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective. They will be analyzed and compared with the character of the English-language *Bad Luck Brian* memes.*

Keywords: meme, Internet genres, anthroponyms, connotations, cross-cultural studies.

1. Introduction: Aims, material and methods

The Internet lore constitutes an increasingly important part of modern culture. It offers great opportunities for language users to be creative and share the results of their work with others. The Internet communication is the area of human activity in which humour is ubiquitous, with new interesting genres and forms worth studying (Laineste 2003; Baran 2012; Milner 2012). They are developing intensively, which to a great extent is conditioned by technological and

cultural changes. Some traditional forms are being replaced by the new ones: for instance, Laineste (2016: 18) observes that “the classical punch-line joke, being on the decline, has partly been replaced by various humorous genres made available on the Internet”. One of them is the meme – a genre which combines the verbal with the visual.

Memes employ various language means, including proper names which constitute a much smaller group than common nouns in natural languages. The focal issue of the paper is the use of selected first names in memes. Since English is the modern *lingua franca*, it is not surprising that it is often the main language of online humorous texts, which contributes to their globalization (Laineste & Voolaid 2016: 27). This process can also be reflected in the repertoire of names used in memes in particular languages, which may incorporate foreign names used in such texts. On the one hand, the Internet lore offers texts shared across languages and cultures, on the other hand, it also contains the ones which are culture-bound and whose occurrence may be limited to one culture. The names used in such memes are culture-specific meme constituents.

The specific aims of the present study are twofold: first, to analyze two macroseries of memes, the Polish one *Typowy Janusz*, containing the Polish first name *Janusz*, an anthroponym belonging to the latter of the above mentioned groups, and the *Bad Luck Brian* memes, in which the English name *Brian* represents the former group; second, to discuss the status of the two names in respective languages from a lingua-cultural perspective. For the purpose of the study, two corpora of memes were collected, each of which contained 120 memes, taken from various websites.

The methodology adopted for the needs of the analysis is conditioned by the aims: first, the memes are analyzed as text of culture with a special focus on the contents. The analysis is followed by the discussion on how the two names function in Polish and English from the perspective of meme influence on the anthroponyms. The objective is to determine whether the use of the names in a series of memes has resulted in the development of connotations of the anthroponyms in question. In case it has, it will be observed in which spheres and how the connotative potential of the names is employed by language users.

2. The meme from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective

One of the areas where the ludic function of the language tends to dominate is the Internet. One can find many humour-dedicated websites and a plethora of humorous elements spread across various sites (Laineste 2003). From the receiver’s perspective, humour contributes greatly to the attractiveness of the text. On the Internet, where the information load is great, the texts have to capture the reader’s attention, be noticed among many others, often similar ones. Therefore, presenting facts or commenting on them in a humorous way is more likely to attract prospective readers.

In the Internet lore, the human need to play with language and to introduce humorous elements in the process of communication has resulted in the creation of new genres, such as the meme. It is a multi-layered combination of text and image distributed by Internet users. Memes can become widespread to various extents: some of them cross borders and become known in various cultures, while others are limited to smaller groups of Internet users. As observed by Lin et al. (2014), the full set of meme meanings can be determined when the origins and the development of the meme is known.

As Shifman (2014: 56-58) emphasizes, one should differentiate between the meme and the viral. The former is a collection of texts, i.e. re-usable images set in a given, frequently repeated background combined with a short text (Laineste & Voolaid 2016: 27), while the latter is a single cultural unit shared by millions internet users. In the case of memes, the

repetition of a given image involves transformation, which means that the meme creators have to show creativity in producing a new meme belonging to a series.

Many memes focus on general topics, for instance, stupidity or sex, which facilitates their sharing and decoding as well as modifying. As for sharing, if the focal issue of a meme is of general character, it means that such memes can be easily translated into another language, as it is the case with *Bad Luck Brian* memes which function in the Polish internet lore, labelled as *pechowiec Brian* (lit. Unlucky Brian) memes. The *Bad Luck Brian* memes have no elements of class mockery. It is not surprising, since, as Laineste and Voolaid observe (2016: 27), while commenting on the better-travelled humorous items, “just a fragment of them [memes – J. Sz.] focused on politics, nations, or specific, locally known group of stereotypes”.

The Polish series of memes featuring the character called *Janusz* is a good example illustrating this kind of cultural texts, i.e. the ones set in a particular culture and expressing notions related to it. The memes in question refer to a complex stereotype of a bad-mannered Pole. The image is viewed as culture-bound and rich in connotations by Poles; yet, from the perspective of receivers from a different culture, it is a simple picture of a representative of a lower social class lacking good manners.

From the perspective of humour research, the studies on joking class-based slurs, which may be masked by ethnic stereotypes, are relevant to the present analysis, especially those by Dundes (1971), Davies (1982; 1987; 1990; 1991; 1998; 1999; 2002), Laineste (2008), Kuipers (2006), Davies (2010), and Berger (1998). These works contribute to the theoretical framework of the study as well as those on lingua-cultural aspects of slurs (Mieder 1993; 1996; Coinnigh 2009) and linguistic exponents of stereotypes (Bartmiński 2003).

As already mentioned, it is the memes containing these two names that will be discussed in the present paper and one of the reasons for choosing them was the difference in their character. While *Bad Luck Brian* memes express contents which in the case of the vast majority of memes can be transferred into another cultural reality, many of *Typowy Janusz* memes seem to be more culture-bound. Therefore, transferring them into another culture would result in more significant changes in the interpretation by prospective target culture receivers (Szczeszunowicz 2018: 463). It will be observed how the general *versus* culture-bound relation influences the connotative and phraseocreative potential of the names in question.

3. Anthroponyms as carriers of connotations

Proper names and common names are two classes of nouns: the former term is used to refer to a noun which refers to a class of entities and the latter – to the name of a unique entity. A distinction is made between a proper noun and a proper name: only single-name proper names can be classified as proper nouns, which means that *John* is both a proper noun and a proper name, whereas *John the Third* is a proper name, but not a proper noun (OCEL: 609).

As for *nomina propria*, they function in a given ethnic community and many of them develop connotations. The notion of connotation can be understood and defined in several ways. Jordanskaja & Mel'čuk (1988: 17) propose the following definition of the term: connotation of a lexical unit is a certain characteristic which the lexical unit attributes to its referent and which is not included in the definition of the lexical unit.

From a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, the fact that connotations are culturally conditioned is of great importance. Apresjan (2000: 76) states that connotations may be untypical and differ for corresponding or similar lexical units in various languages and sometimes even in the case of words in one language. It is so, because connotations reflect the

cultural perception of objects, phenomena, processes etc. related to a given lexical unit developed in a given ethnic community.

The most important kinds of proper names are: anthroponyms – names of persons, e.g. *Henry, Sitting Bull, Smith*; toponyms – names of places, e.g. *London, America*, zoonyms – names of animals, e.g. *Hector, Tabby*; chrematonyms – names of man-made objects, products, institutions etc., e.g. *Lexus, Natinal Health Service*; ideonyms – names of broadly understood pieces of art like literary texts, paintings etc., e.g. *Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland, Guernica*. All categories can be further subdivided, for instance, anthroponyms comprise first names, nicknames, surnames, patronyms, and ethnonyms.

Proper names function in a given culture, many of them are endowed with connotations, for instance, the names involved in important historical events. Cross-cultural relations contribute to the development of connotations of ethnonyms (Coinngh 2009; Mieder 1993; 1996), which often are employed in jokes in which references to stereotypes of nationalities are made (Davies 1990; Brzozowska 2012). Furthermore, various texts of culture, such as literary works, popular songs, and films, contribute to the connotative potential of proper names which may be implemented in various humour genres.

In fact, the connotations of certain proper names may become part of collective memory of a particular ethnic group (Szerszunowicz 2018: 459). Therefore, some of them are included in lexicographic works, which – apart from the above given examples of the name *Janusz* in online dictionaries – is attested by Schutz (2002: 639), who observes that “in recent Dutch dictionaries the proper names *Johnny* and *Anita* (in Belgium *Marina*) show up as common nouns meaning fashion-sensitive, lower class youngsters from what we call the *patatageneratie* (couch-potato-generation)”.

Moreover, certain names sound in a way interpreted by the native speakers of a given language as a name sounding in a special way, for instance, slightly comic, as in the case of the English surname *Buggins*:

Buggins' turn (*informal*) the procedure whereby posts are given not to those most capable of filling them but to a relatively mediocre candidates as a reward for long and undistinguished service [...]. *Buggins* is an invented name which to English ears is both undistinguished and slightly comic; often preceded by *the principle of*.

(ODEI: 81.)

As can be seen from the above examples, many names develop evaluative connotations. In fact, the Internet lore has generated its own repertoire of names which have become part of the shared knowledge of internet users. In the English-language memes, the names used in macroseries comprises, *inter alia*, such anthroponyms as: *Bill* (*Be like Bill*), *Brian* (*Bad Luck Brian*), *Greg* (*Good Guy Greg*), *Phil* (*Friend Zone Phil*), *Johnny* (*Friend Zone Johnny*), *Steve* (*Scumbag Steve*) and *Stacy* (*Scumbag Stacy*).

In Polish memes, among the commonly used names are: *Janusz, Grażyna, Seba, Karyna, Brajanek* and *Dżesika*. Although originally the use of the anthroponyms in question was limited to the Internet lore, in time the names have gained certain popularity, especially among the younger generation of Poles. In modern Polish, the names at issue are also used in everyday conversations. Furthermore, they are employed in some press texts, since their novelty is attractive from the reader's perspective (Szerszunowicz 2018: 460-461). Yet, it is not only stylistic aspects that contributed to their spreading. They serve as language labels by means of which one can refer to a set of characteristics in an economical way.

4. A case study: *Typowy Janusz vs. Bad Luck Brian*

The case study focuses on two macroseries of memes: the first one, Polish, features Janusz – a middle-aged primitive man, the second one, popular in the English speaking community, shows the life of unlucky Brian. The analysis will aim at discussing the two macroseries of memes and their heroes and determining how the memes influenced the status of the anthroponyms in the two languages, respectively, Polish and English.

4.1. *Typowy Janusz* memes: culture-bound labelling

In the Polish Internet lore, the name *Janusz* has developed a connotative potential over the last few years. At present, it is used figuratively not only in memes, but also in the colloquial variety of the Polish language and in the journalese (Szerszunowicz 2018) although the consulted printed dictionaries do not attest the figurative use of the name *Janusz* or any phraseological units with the constituent. However, some online sources include it: *Miejski słownik slangu i mowy potocznej* (Urban dictionary of slang and colloquial speech) offers the following definitions of the word *Janusz/janusz*: ‘a pejorative term for football fans who occasionally come to matches, watching them on television’, ‘a person who does not know anything about a given discipline, e.g. *Janusze budownictwa* (lit. *Januszes* [the name *Janusz* in the plural form] of construction)’, ‘a computer game participant who pretends to know a lot, but who, in fact, does not know anything’, ‘a person who has no idea about something’, ‘a typical, bad-looking Polish man, whose characteristic feature is red cheeks (also known as irons), this person is also noticeable because he wears socks (preferably white) with sandals, widespread in the vicinity of technical universities’ (MSSiMP).

The second source, online *Obserwatorium Językowe Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego* (OJUW, Language observatory of the University of Warsaw) which monitors new words and phrases, defines it in a following way: ‘a man who is not handsome, epitomizing stereotypical, negative characteristics attributed to Poles: ribaldry, fondness of alcohol, lack of manners and tacky clothes, also used with reference to other nations’. It also contains two derivatives of the word *Janusz*: the verb *januszować* ‘to behave in an unmannerly way, typical of *janusz*’ and the adjective *januszowaty* ‘having typical characteristics of *janusz* or the ones considered to be characteristic of *janusz*’.

The third one, *Wielki słownik języka polskiego* [Great dictionary of the Polish language], which classifies it as informal and depreciative, contains a brief definition: ‘a man whose appearance, behaviour and actions evoke aversion in the speaker, since he/she considers them as a sign of a given person being primitive, limited and unable to pursue particular activities’ (WSJP). The variants *janusz* and *Janusz* are included, which attest the status of a relatively new lexical item, viewed both as an appellative noun and a figuratively used proper name. The entry also comprises fixed expressions: *jakiś, typowy janusz* (lit. some, typical *janusz*), *wąsaci janusze* (lit. *januszes* with moustaches), *janusze i grażyny* (lit. *januszes* and *grażynas* [the plural form of *Grażyna*]). This online dictionary provides the information of the origins of the unit *janusz* in the modern Polish language: in the entry, it is stated that it came into use around 2013, probably as a result of the influence of memes (WSJP).

In fact, many Polish memes feature Janusz, showing his personal traits and intellectual properties as well as typical behaviour. They portrait as a primitive, bad-mannered man, rather vulgar and coarse, epitomizing all that is considered to be shameful by Poles and which – from a cross-cultural perspective – can possibly be attributed to a lower class representative (cf. Davies 2010). The physical appearance is also presented in memes: Janusz is fat, red-cheeked, with a moustache. His typical attributes comprise the following elements: a white vest, a black leather jacket, sandals worn with white socks, a Volkswagen Passat, usually diesel, without air

conditioning, a bottle of locally produced beer, cigarettes, he also always carries a plastic bag from a supermarket. His attributes are so familiar to Poles that some of them are presented in the series of memes titled *Typowy Janusz – pakiet startowy* (lit. Typical Janusz – a Starter Pack).



Figure 1. *Typowy Janusz – Pakiet Startowy. Typical Janusz – Starter Pack.*
Source: Retrieved May 5, 2017 from http://memy.pl/mem_1064197_typowy_janusz.

Another element of his portrait is a characteristic pronunciation: he speaks in a way typical of an uneducated person, most possibly coming from a village. In the informal variety of the modern Polish language, the word *Janusz/janusz* and the phraseme *typowy Janusz* function as language labels used to refer to a broad cultural concept, i.e. a set of characteristics and manners considered to be shameful in the Polish society (Szerszunowicz 2017a). His appearance together with attributes and behaviour are immediately recognized and understood by members of the Polish community, thus they gain a status similar of that of collective symbols (cf. Wodak, Reisigl 2001: 381).

In the Internet lore, the character called *Janusz* is presented in various situations: he is shown with his family, especially his wife whose stereotypical picture has also developed, he goes on holiday, he works, for instance, as a mechanic, construction worker or Jack-of-all-trades, or he is unemployed and spends his leisure, mostly at home, watching television. As for his family, he lives in a block of flats with his wife *Grażyna*, in some memes also named *Halina*, who has low IQ and loves gossiping, which motivated her nickname “district monitor”. He has a son called *Sebastian*, for short called *Seba* or *Sebix*. Although the young man is an adult, he hardly works and hangs around with friends. He is the partner of *Karyna*, a young woman who is intellectually limited and shows bad tastes in clothes. They have two children, a girl – *Dżesika* and a boy – *Brajanek*, whose foreign names meant to sound sophisticated indicate narrow-mindedness and a low level of the parents’ education. In fact, all the family members exhibit characteristics observed in the Polish society which are despised and ridiculed by Poles.

The memes tend to employ two lines: the opening line and the bottom one, which are divided by a picture, usually showing Janusz, who is an anonymous middle-aged man with a moustache. In the text, the Polish language is used, with the rare exceptions of a word or phrase imitating the speech of a foreigner, for instance, English and French. Photos showing different men are used in *Typowy Janusz* memes, with some being used for creating a series, while others – used only occasionally. The bottom line is incongruous with the introducer, which creates a humorous effect enhanced by the visual element. In very few memes there is a single line on top. The lines in memes often resemble spoken language utterances: they may contain addressatives, for instance, the name of the wife, *Grażyna* or *Halina*. In the case of the latter name, it is spelt *Halyna*, which reflects the substandard pronunciation, typical of the Warsaw region. Several memes contain incorrect forms of lexical items, which is indicative of

chleba się nie najesz lit. Take bread with the soup... without the bread you will not eat enough) or while enjoying leisure activities (*Grażyna, nie myj się... na basen idziemy* lit. Grażyna, don't wash yourself... we're going to the swimming pool), in particular on holidays (*Wylądowaliśmy... bij brawo, Grażyna* lit. We have landed... clap, Grażyna, clap, *Grażyna, gdzie w tych Włochach... kupić kaszankę* lit. Grażyna, where can I in this Italy... buy a blood sausage, *Grażyna... mamy olinkluziw... rób kanapki* lit. Grażyna, we have the all-inclusive option... make sandwiches). Generally speaking, he violates all kinds of social norms most people observe (*Dzisiaj gryl... na balkonie* lit. Today BBQ... on the balcony).

His bad taste in clothes is also featured in memes, which comprise his attributes, in particular the most noticeable – white socks and sandals (*Grażyna, szykuj czyste skarpetki... idę w sandałach* lit. Grażyna, prepare clean socks... I'll wear sandals (see Fig. 2), *Idę na plażę... tylko skarpety założę* lit. I'm going to the beach... I'll just put on my socks). From the character's point of view, wearing socks and sandals is the norm which is attested by the following meme lines: *Grażyna, patrz, idzie w sandałach... bez skarpet* (lit. Grażyna, look, he's walking in sandals... without socks).

As mentioned before, he is presented as an uneducated person, using incorrect forms. His incompetence manifests in his pronunciation, inappropriate lexical choices, bad grammar and wrong spelling. His lack of education is also ridiculed in terms of speaking foreign languages. In one of the memes, he interprets French words as similarly pronounced Polish ones: “*Bon jour*”... *Słyszysz, Grażyna, można wygrać bony na żur* lit. Do you hear, Grażyna, you can win talons for żur [a kind of Polish soup whose name is pronounced similarly to the French word *jour*].

In the analyzed memes, Janusz is also pictured as uncivilized, antisocial, and racist (*Grażyna, patrz Murzyn... zrób mu zdjęcie* lit. Grażyna, look, a black person... take a photo of him). A special feature of Janusz is being overly clever, trying by all means to pay less, even if it involves behaving in an antisocial way. This attitude is reflected in many memes, like the following ones: *Ty, Grażyna, popatrz, cukier w promocji... weznie ze 100 kg* lit. Grażyna, look, bargain price for sugar... I'll take 100 kilos (see Fig 3), *Grażyna, nie kupuj tych pocztówek... esemesa się wyśle taniej będzie* lit. Grażyna, don't buy these postcards... we'll send a text message, it will be cheaper, *Grażyna, zacznij robić słoiki z bigosem... żeby nie przepłacać za jedzenie jak pojedziemy do Egiptu* lit. Grażyna start preparing bigos [a Polish dish of stewed cabbage with meat]... so that we would not overpay for food when we go to Egypt, *Nie dawaj mu napiwku... ma zapłacone* lit. Don't tip him... he has been paid, *Grażyna, 2 zł za głupią wodę... w kranie mam to samo za darmo, idziemy stąd* lit. Grażyna, 2 zlotys for stupid water... in the tap is the same for free, let's get out of here, *Ubikacja płatna... idę w krzaki* lit. Paid toilet... I'll go to the bushes). The calculations the man makes indicate clearly that he is an exceptionally intellectually limited person.

Janusz is not only narrow-minded, but also greedy. He is a person who wants things for himself at all cost, which often means being extremely self-centered and dishonest (*Pamiętaj, Grażyna... weź hotelowe mydelka i ręczniki* lit. Remember, Grażyna... take the little hotel soaps and towels, *Grażyna, weź więcej parawanów... zajmiemy sobie plażę* lit. Grażyna, take more beach wind screens... we'll take the beach for ourselves). He is also calculating, which is reflected in his attitude towards her daughter's boyfriend: *Grażyna, nie szykuj drugiego łóżka, niech razem spiom... mercedesem/Passatem przyjechał* lit. Grażyna, don't prepare a second bed, let them sleep together... he drives a Mercedes/Passat). Showing off and trying to be perceived by others as better than he really is, for instance richer, is also presented in the memes (*Grażyna, zamknij okna w aucie... niech myślą, że mamy klimatyzację* lit. Grażyna, close the windows in the car... let them think that we have air conditioning (see Fig 2)).

The man is also depicted as a lazy and incompetent person (*Jakbym wiedział ile tu jest roboty... to bym się za to nie brał* lit. If I had known how much work is to be done... I wouldn't

take it). Irrespective of the lack of skills, Janusz has a very high evaluation of his potential, which is shown in many memes showing him working as a mechanic and talking to customers. He is passive and lives a parasitic life, for instance he takes money from his wife (*Ty, Zenek... dawaj na browca, stara kasę mi dała* lit. Zenek... let's go to have a beer, my old woman gave me some money).

The connotative potential of proper names may motivate fixed phrases. As Dobrowol'skij and Piirainen state (2005: 245), "in some cases, speakers perceive conventional figurative units that contain a proper name typical of a given national culture as being culturally connoted". The anthroponym *Janusz* belongs to this group: this name has developed a rich connotative potential, which is reflected in the new layer of Polish phraseology. The connotative potential stems from memes and is developed by new realizations of this genre (Szerszunowicz 2018; WSJP).

Apart from the phraseme *typowy Janusz/janusz*, the name in question is the core element of a phraseological pattern *JANUSZE + NOUN Gen.*, in which the first constituent, *janusze*, is the plural form of the analyzed first name (cf. WSJP). Strong as the negative evaluation carried by the name may be, it is still emphasized by the use of the plural form – *janusze*. From the normative view point, the word *janusze* is marked, since it is acceptable only in the lower level of the colloquial variety – the standard plural form is *Januszowie* (Grzenia 2002: 144). It is worth adding that the depreciative use of substandard plural forms of proper names was a common Newspeak practice during the period of Communism in Poland. For instance, in the seventies and eighties of the 20th c., the plural-form names *kuronie* and *miczniki*, derived from the surnames of Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik, were used by Communist party dignitaries to express depreciation of the politicians who belonged to the Opposition (Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak 2008). The standard forms of the names indicating the couple of the family are *Kuronowie* and *Michnikowie*. It can be seen that the form *janusze* resembles the ones like *kuronie* and *miczniki* in its structure and markedness (Szerszunowicz 2018: 461).

A study of the pattern *JANUSZE + NOUN Gen.* conducted by means of the WebCorp tool resulted in collecting the textual realizations of the model. The phraseme *janusze biznesu* was most frequent with 62 occurrences. The productivity of the pattern is attested by other examples: *janusze plaży* (lit. *januszes* of the beach), *janusze budownictwa* (lit. *januszes* of construction), *janusze internetu* (lit. *januszes* of the Internet), *janusze inżynierii* (lit. *januszes* of engineering), *janusze architektury* (lit. *januszes* of architecture), *janusze hydrauliki* (lit. *januszes* of plumbing), *janusze marketingu* (lit. *januszes* of marketing), *janusze transportu* (lit. *januszes* of transportation), *janusze rolnictwa* (lit. *januszes* of agriculture) (Szerszunowicz 2018: 462).



Figure 4. *Januszes* of architecture. Source: Retrieved February 14, 2017 from <http://www.blasty.pl/9624/janusze-architektury>, <http://www.obrazki.jeja.pl/159738,janusze-architektury.html>.

It should also be added that the novelty of the model is also important from a cross-linguistic viewpoint (Szerszunowicz 2017b), since its realizations are stylistically marked as neophrasemes in Polish (Szerszunowicz 2018). The model also enables language users to create their own expressions according to their communication needs. In the process of communication, using this pattern is economical: it allows for expressing in a concise way the evaluation and emotional attitude to a given group of persons. Thanks to the presence of the slot, it may be used in a variety of contexts to comment on shameful behaviour, lack of competence or absurd ideas (Szerszunowicz 2016a).

From a cross-linguistic perspective, the phraseme *typowy Janusz/janusz* and the model *JANUSZE + NOUN Gen.* can be classified as lacunary expressions (Szerszunowicz 2016b, 2018). Both units of expression evoke the association with the meme character bearing the name *Janusz*, viewed as a typical representative of a certain group of Polish society, and all his manners etc., thus the name verbalizes a complex ethno-specific concept. The culture-boundedness is well attested in the meme describing the Polish national character viewed from Janusz's perspective: *Wódki nie pijesz, do kościoła nie chodzisz... ty to w ogóle Polak jesteś?* (lit. You don't drink vodka, you don't go to church... are you Polish at all?). Thus, the anthroponymic constituent used figuratively belongs to the zero-equivalent elements. As already mentioned, its connotative potential is also realized in its derivatives, i.e. the adjective *januszowaty* and the verb *januszować* as well as the jocular pseudo-chrematonym *Januszex* – the name of the company owned by a person who wants to get rich quickly at the expense of other people. The fictitious chrematonym alludes to the names of Polish companies ending with the western-sounding suffix *-ex*, which were very popular after the political transformation of 1989. Such names often combine Polish words with the suffix (Pocztex ← Polish *poczta* 'post' + *-ex*), which may create a humorous effect, just as in the case of *Januszex*.

Secondly, the phraseological pattern itself creates a cross-linguistic gap (Szerszunowicz 2016b, 2018). For instance, the English idiomatic stock does not contain a similar structure with a plural form of a first name followed by a noun in the genitive case used to express strongly negative evaluation of particular persons' ideas, competences or skills. It should be added that even if the structure existed, then it would be a parallel equivalent in terms of systematic equivalence – the general meaning would be retained, but the quality of "typically Polish lower-class" would be missing, while it can be assumed that it will be interpreted as lower class slur with no indication of culture-boundedness. From a native Polish user perspective, the phrase is automatically associated with both class and Polishness, which memes highlight in different ways, for instance, by showing Janusz against the background resembling a white and red Polish national flag or saturating the lines with the names of Polish realia (*bigos* 'sauerkraut-and-meat stew', *kaszanka* 'blood sausage', *zup* 'soup made from fermented rye flour').

In fact, the mentality, intellectual potential, manners and behaviour of the character called Janusz shown in the analyzed examples can be observed in other memes, featuring for instance the socks and sandals guy, tourists abroad or the redneck (cf. Davies 2010). It can be assumed that the same characteristics or manners will be the object of mockery across cultures, which is corroborated by the observations made by Berger (1993: 68):

In the riddles above Poles are dumb (even the pope), Italians are dirty and cowardly, and Jewish women are materialistic. In England, I found that many of the same jokes that Americans tell about Poles are told about the Irish. Quite likely the same jokes are told in other countries about different minority groups.

In the same vein, from the lexicographic perspective, OJUW registers this universality of connotations carried by the lexeme *janusz*: in the entry, it is stated that the word may be used

with reference to anybody who shows the characteristics, irrespective of their nationality, for example: *niemieccy janusze* lit. German *janusz*es.

However, two points should be made about the above mentioned memes and the series featuring Janusz: first, characters like the socks and sandals guy are not constructed in the same way in which Janusz has been created. The image of Janusz is full, since it comprises many elements from different spheres of life. Second, from the emic perspective, i.e. from the perspective of a Polish receiver of the meme, the character is deeply set in the Polish reality – not an anonymous person exhibiting certain features, relating to lower class slur (cf. Davies 2010) – and strongly contextualized with many exponents of stereotypically viewed Polishness. Even though his way of thinking and behaviour pictured in the analyzed memes can be associated with those of lower class representatives in general, still the image is viewed as one typically observed in the Polish environment.

Furthermore, the image of Janusz relates to the autostereotype: Bartmiński (2003: 73) states that the autostereotype of Poles comprises positively evaluated personal characteristics (being courageous, proud, intelligent, educated, wise) and negatively assessed existential ones (being lazy, prodigal, unsystematic). Typically, the polar oppositions (dirty–clean, avaricious–generous, boastful–reserved) are found in ethnic jokes featuring characters of one’s own and the other (cf. Davies 1990). In this case, the meme character epitomizes the negative features viewed as typically Polish (the negative part of the autostereotype), involving the associations of the lower class and combining it with the notion of being clever understood as the ability to solve problems in a creative way, which may be slightly illegal, strange and/or egoistic (Szczeszunowicz 2013).

In these memes, mockery and self-mockery seem to be involved simultaneously: it is based on the meme author’s evaluation of persons showing manners associated with the lower class, i.e. inferior to the author who observes them; it analyses what they do and comments on their behaviour, at the same time being aware of belonging to the same society, thus maybe consciously and/or unconsciously exhibiting some of the despised features and habits themselves, which involves the element of status anxiety common in ethnic jokes (Berger 1993: 69). Laughing at collectively despised Janusz is socially important, since it is related to both putting this character and his behaviour into perspective and acknowledging that one is conscious of the existence of these kind of people in the society and able to evaluate such persons. As observed by Berger (1993: 69), while discussing ethnic jokes, humour is often aimed not so much at ethnicity, but at the socioeconomic status and marginality of a given group. In the case of the analyzed memes, the mechanism is similar: the memes give a release of negative emotions towards the character generated by a sense of superiority of those who laugh at Janusz as a person of lower intellectual (mentality, language), social (behaviour, manners) and economic (car makes and other artefacts) standing.

4.2. *Bad Luck Brian* memes: universality as a dominant

First names also appear in English-language memes, for instance *Brian* – the character in the *Bad Luck Brian* image macroseries. The name, of Irish origin, most possibly derived from the Old Celtic word meaning ‘high’ or ‘noble’, is perennially popular in Ireland. To a great extent, its popularity is culturally conditioned: Brian Boru (Gaelic Brian Bóroimhe, c. 940-1014) was a famous warrior credited with driving the Vikings from Ireland who eventually became the king of Ireland. In the Middle Ages, the name was relatively common in East Anglia where it was introduced by Breton settlers and in northern England – brought by Scandinavians from Ireland. The name appears also in a variant form *Bryan*. It also has a female form *Brianna*, of which several variants exist, for instance: *Brienne*, *Brina*, *Breanna* (DFN).

The aforementioned macroseries features a photo showing a red-haired teenage boy, wearing braces, dressed in a plaid sweater vest. The picture of Brian is accompanied by a caption describing an unlucky, embarrassing, and/or tragic event. The photo shows a real person, Kyle Craven, born August 10, 1989, whose schoolmate, Ian Davies, put the picture on Reddit in 2012 (Contrera 2015). Ian thought that *Bad Luck Brian* would sound more interesting than *Bad Luck Kyle*. Indeed the repetition of the ‘b’ sound in two out of three components adds to the attractiveness of the macroseries name.



Figure 5. A *Bad Luck Brian* meme. Source: Retrieved March 12, 2017 from <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bad-luck-brian/photos/sort/oldest>.

In time, both the series and the person shown in the memes have gained popularity: Kyle was invited to Internet conventions, *Bad Luck Brian* T-shirts, paperweights, and stuffed toys started to be produced along with other gadgets and sold by Walmarts and Hot Topic – it is not surprising that before long his image was used in Volkswagen and RealPlayer advertisements (Gidman 2015). The image macro appeared on Facebook and Twitter, with *Bad Luck Brian* channel available on YouTube. Nowadays, the meme character has become less popular, with the peak in January 2012. The meme, fitting in with the *Bad Luck Brian* series, makes a reference to his present job – he works for his father company which builds churches (Contrera 2015).



Figure 6. A *Bad Luck Brian* meme featuring Kyle Craven. Source: Retrieved March 30, 2017 from <https://imgflip.com/i/m3o7q>.

The caption appears in two parts: the first line is placed on top and the other one – at the bottom of the picture. The division contributes to creating the suspense effect: the top part introduces the situation Brian is in or presents the activity he does, while the bottom part brings the unexpected and/or incongruous ending (Kuipers 2002, 2005). The top line and the bottom one are separated by the photo showing Brian and the picture functions as a visual element breaking the setup from the punch line. The two lines differ from each other, yet the research corpus contains one meme in which both parts of the caption are identical: *Goes to a Justin Bieber concert... Goes to a Justin Bieber concert.*

In the Internet lore, Brian has become a symbol of “a stroke of hilarious bad luck” (Contrera 2015). In the memes, he appears in various situations which always result with an incredibly unhappy ending, for instance, *Brian opens the window for the mosquito to go out... 6 flies, 3 cockroaches, 2 mice and 1 Jehova witness come in, has a pet rock... it runs away, goes to a 24 hours store... closed, checks both ways before crossing road... gets hit by a plane, invents time travel... mugged by future self every payday of his life.* As can be seen from the following examples, Internet users show great creativity to produce new ministories about Brian and his adventures with a predictable unhappy or tragic ending.

The *Bad Luck Brian* memes can be roughly divided into three groups. The first one, smallest of all, is composed of memes in which wordplay is dominant, for example, *Swallows his pride... chokes, Is the only child... but not the favorite one, Finally finds something positive in his life... HIV, Listen to death metal... dies.* It can be concluded that meme creators find word play based lines more difficult to invent than to tell a simple story about Brian’s misfortunes.

The second group, also not that big, is based on various cultural allusions, like in the following memes: *Gets invited to the White House... to trim Trump’s bush, Dresses as Abraham Lincoln for Halloween... gets shot, Stop assassination attempt on Trump... assassinated by Trump, Invited over to dinner... by Hannibal Lectern, Goes as Batman for Halloween... parents get killed, Buys Saint Anthony holy medallion... loses it, Survives nuclear bomb in Hiroshima... catches the first train to Nagasaki, Finally becomes a sith... electrocuted by his master, Takes first cruise... Costa Concordia, Has birthday... on 9/11.* Decoding such memes requires cultural knowledge on the side of the reader: the person who interprets the texts has to be familiar with texts of culture, facts from famous people’s lives etc. to understand the message properly. In the perception of the meme creator, the cultural references used in the memes belong to the knowledge expected from an average Internet user.

The third group is by far the biggest: the memes belonging to it present Brian in various everyday situations in which he experiences bad luck. As he is a teenager, it comes naturally that he is shown as a student: *Makes it to class on time... wrong school, Spends all night studying... sleeps through exam, Copies one sentence from Wikipedia... expelled from college for plagiarism, Looks up bad luck in the dictionary... sees his picture, Gets best grade in class... test turned out, First in family to finish college... \$100 000 debt, no job, Seduced by a teacher... homeschooled, Sneezes in class... accidentally farts.* His leisure is also a subject of several memes: *Plays hide & seek... can’t find himself, Plays with himself... loses, Plays tennis... a wild circle appears, Goes surfing for the first time... hurricane.*

Memes describe not only Brian’s school life: attention is also paid to his family relations, especially those with his parents (*Parents get divorced... no one wants custody, Brian and his imaginary friends are kidnapped... parents plea for the return of imaginary friend, Plays hide and seek with his parents... gets abandoned*). The word *parents* refers to both mother and father, thus being abandoned or unwanted by two of them shows the intensity of Brian’s bad luck. Similarly, the use of the lexical item *family* indicates all the members, as it is the case in the following memes: *Runs away from home with a family dog... finds a poster only looking*

for a dog, Constantly bullied and beaten up at school... was homeschooled, Gets picked to be on a family feud... rest of the family doesn't show up. A prominent figure is his mother: Only Facebook friend is Mom... cyberbullied, Goes to strip club... mom works there, with other members of the family rarely present in the memes. For instance, in one of them, the figure of his uncle appears (*Touched by Jesus... his Mexican uncle*), but here the presence of the uncle is more dependent on wordplay – the name *Jesus* is a common one in the Spanish-speaking countries and the word *uncle* can be easily substituted by a different one, for instance *friend*.

Only a few memes are devoted to Brian's work, which can be explained by his young age. The ones in which the work environment is shown include the following ones: *Can only work part-time because of health reasons... needs full time hours to get health insurance, Open own business... gets fired, Interviews for job with family business... doesn't get the job*. The working environment is also the area when Brian is unlucky and all his undertakings fall through.

Many *Bad Luck Brian* memes describe phenomena situated in the sphere of taboo, which comprises among other, injuries, illnesses, and death. As for the first two categories, there are rather few memes: *Gets 'no tear' soap in his eyes... goes blind, Puts eye drops in... superglue, Buries dead squirrel... gets bubonic plague*. Death is the most common subject, with many examples referring to various situations in which bad luck puts an end to Brian's life: *Tries to hold breath the longest in the class... dies, First to jump in the pool to save little girl from drowning... drowns, Swims for the first time in ocean... has nosebleed and gets eaten by sharks, Has a heart attack... ambulance can't find him, Rides bumper car... hits by drunk driver, Fortune cookie says You'll have a long life... fortune cookie was poisoned, Wears bulletproof vest... gets shot in the face, Escapes a burning building... gets hit by a fire engine*. In some cases, not dying or not dying instantly is the worse option, again caused by sheer bad luck: *Jumps from tall building... doesn't die instantly, Holds a world record... for the most suicides*. Two memes from this group include religious references: *Dies and goes to hell... Satan tells him to leave, Dies and goes to heaven... God doesn't know who he is*.

Dating and sex are two very important areas presented in the *Bad Luck Brian* memes: he is shown as an adolescent (*Gets first pubic hair... in his salad*) who takes a keen interest in the sphere of sexual life, which is attested by several memes, for instance: *Builds courage to send naked picture... sends to Mom, Watches porn for the first time... it's of his parents, Wants to pause online porn... accidentally presses Share on Facebook*. Others highlight his misfortunes in relations with women: *Hires a prostitute... she pays to leave, Girl wants to 69... he can only count to 23, Has a sleepover with his girlfriend... wets his bed, Meets girl from online dating site... is a man, Loses virginity... it comes back, Inherits family fortune... finally gets a girlfriend Thai transsexual with gambling tendencies, Has an online girlfriend for three years... she won't even skype with him*.

In the sphere of taboo, there are also scatological references, observed for instance in the following lines: *Farts 47 times on a plane thinks they're silent... wearing headphones, Stuck in traffic after having Mexican dinner... shits, Tries to stealthily fart in the classroom... shits, Pee splits into two streams... both miss the toilet, Tries to pee in the shower... shits*. These lines appear in several variant forms, with minor changes, for example, lexical substitutions or amplifications. In this group, memes tend to start with a description with intimate and/or embarrassing action or situation which becomes unimaginably shameful.

Undeniably, all the memes present Brian as an extremely unlucky young man, thus creating his portrait. One can learn that he has a family that does not want him, he is rejected by women, hopeless both at school and at work, in short, haunted by bad luck. It remains to be analyzed whether this image is reflected in the language. To determine whether language users employ the anthroponym *Brian* or the phrase *Bad Luck Brian* in a figurative sense, the corpora were consulted.

The COCA search and the material retrieved by the WebCorp tool did not offer many examples of the employment of the figurative potential of the name *Brian*. Apart from occasional uses like *I don't really care that much, and actually find it humorous, but today I was Bad Luck Brian*, the retrieved examples referred to the memes. It shows that due to the popularity the *Bad Luck Brian* memes, the name *Brian* – and even more the expression *Bad Luck Brian* – is associated with the notion of bad luck and certain related notions which may either cause or result in being unlucky like helplessness, being intellectually limited, having problems in the sphere of interpersonal relations. However, its connotative potential still has not been realized in the form of common figurative use, derivatives of which would correspond with those derived from the name *Janusz* or idiomatic expressions whose constituent it is. It seems that the primary connotation is with the memes describing extreme bad luck strokes. Furthermore, it can be observed that in the English-speaking community, the connotations have been materialized in different areas, i.e. in the production of various artefacts (T-shirts, toys, paperweights etc.) and in advertising.

The vast majority of *Bad Luck Brian* jokes tell a simple story of universal character which can happen anywhere to anybody, therefore they can be easily rendered in another language and be interpreted as humorous in the target culture. In the case of many memes, literal translation is sufficient to convey the humorous message. Therefore, it is not surprising that many memes about unlucky Brian (Polish: *Pechowiec Brian*) can be found in the Polish Internet lore, as the one below.



Figure 7. A Polish *Pechowiec Brian* meme. Source: Retrieved March 12, 2007 from http://memy.pl/mem/83908/Polknal_pigulke_niesmiertelnosci.

The lines of the Polish meme are as follows: *Swallowed an immortality pill... got imprisoned for life*. Although on the Polish Internet the translated versions dominate, it is worth adding that the Polish equivalent, *Pechowiec Brian* macroseries, is productive: some new memes are made based on wordplay which could not have been transferred from an English text. Moreover, it is sometimes used to refer to the Polish culture-specific phenomena, in order to comment on them and to express criticism, for instance, with reference to politicians, which is illustrated by the meme below.

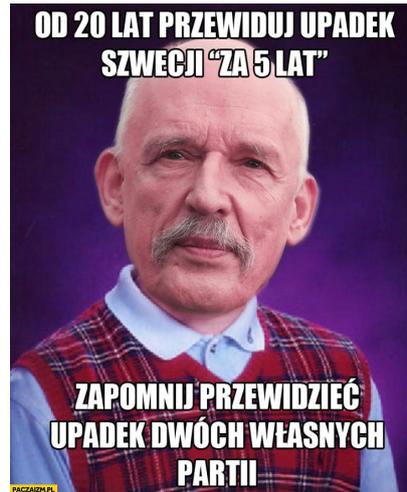


Figure 8. A *Bad Luck Brian* meme showing a Polish politician.

Source: Retrieved September 12, 2017 from

<http://paczaizm.pl/od-20-lat-przewiduj-upadek-szwecji-za-5-lat-zapomnij-przewidziec-upadek-dwoch-wlasnych-partii-korwin/>.

The photo shows a controversial Polish extremely liberal politician by the name of Janusz Korwin-Mikke. The caption refers to his political career. Precisely speaking, the first part of the meme comments on his often repeated predictions concerning the problems of Sweden likely to occur soon (lit. For 20 years predicting the downfall of Sweden “in 5 years”), while the second comments on the break-up of two political parties of which Korwin-Mikke was the leader (lit. Forgot to foresee the downfall of two of his own parties).

To sum up, it should be stressed that apart from the universal character of many *Bad Luck Brian* memes, the role of English as the modern *lingua franca* is very important for their popularity – in the case of Polish *Typowy Janusz* memes, the use of Polish does not foster their dissemination. The last example shows how the *Bad Luck Brian* template can combine the general character of the meme with new, culture-specific contents.

5. Conclusion

The Internet lore tends to play an increasingly important role in various spheres of human life. It has a great influence on many activities in different areas, including communication, both *via* Internet and face-to-face. The lore is rich in new genres, one of which is the meme whose characters include persons. The names of their heroes may be familiar to the vast majority of the Internauts, thus to a big number of language users. Their popularity may lead to developing of a set of connotations evoked in members of a given ethnic group by a given anthroponym.

The connotations of proper names may function in several ways. The analysis conducted for two names shows clearly that the anthroponym *Janusz*, the name of the character of the Polish series, has developed a rich connotative potential, which is attested by figurative use of the name as well as its derivatives and idiomatic expressions. The name functions as an appellative label and its character is reflected in spelling in which two forms are used: *Janusz* – proper name, and *janusz* – a common name. The word has filled a gap in the language system: it names a person who has specified age, appearance, and habits ridiculed and despised by Poles. Thus, from a lingua-cultural perspective, its usefulness is significant: it

is an economical language meaning that it can be exploited in various situations in order to briefly express a complex notion.

In terms of cross-linguistic equivalents, the name has a zero equivalent in the English language, with the closest counterparts being the terms *redneck* and *Polack*, neither of which is a given name. In the analyzed memes, the anthroponym is culture-bound since the name refers to a complex of features from different categories viewed as typical of a group of Poles showing characteristics and manners associated with the lower class. To some extent, the evaluation is culture-bound, too, since it refers to certain features contained in the Polish autostereotype.

The name *Brian* used in memes created originally in the English-speaking area may also be viewed as one which evokes associations. In fact, the figurative use of the name *Brian* has not been attested in the consulted sources. The phrase *Bad Luck Brian* seems to carry a more connotative load than the name itself, although neither the anthroponym in question or the multiword construction refer to culture-specific notions. The person who has bad luck can be called *jinx* or *loser*, which means that a new unit would not fill a gap. It would rather function as a neologism, a stylistically marked synonym of these words. From a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, the vast majority of *Bad Luck Brian* memes are easily transferrable due to their universal character and lack of complicated word play. Furthermore, the memes containing cultural allusions very often contain references to internationally known persons, events, products etc., which means that their translatability is relatively high.

The differences in the status of the two analyzed anthroponyms indicate that the names used in memes should be analyzed from a broader perspective so that their properties could be determined. In further research, their potential figurative use and connotations should be verified so that they could be properly described. In terms of practical implementation, the findings of the analysis can be used in bilingual lexicography. It would give an insight into which names the Internet users employ in memes, why they chose the given names, how they function in the texts, and how the presence of names in memes influences their status in respective languages and cultures.

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