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**METONYMY AND THE GROWTH OF LEXICAL CATEGORIES  
RELATED TO THE CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY FEMALE HUMAN  
BEING**

In a number of recent publications, and especially those which are under the influence of cognitivism (see, for example, Sornig (1981), Kardela & Kleparski (1990), Burkhanov (1999)), it is stressed that metaphorisation processes play an enormous role in the rise of novel meanings and, in particular, the formation of evaluatively charged meanings. Individual data-oriented studies, such as that of Kleparski (1997), show that metaphorisation processes have contributed greatly to the historical growth of the stock of lexical categories related to the conceptual macrocategory FEMALE HUMAN BEING. Simultaneously, it must be pointed out that the role of metonymy and, in particular, the role of personal names in the growth of word stock historically associated with the conceptual macrocategory in question is – to a large extent – overlooked and underestimated in current research on historical semantics. The analysis of the lexical categories related to the conceptual macrocategory FEMALE HUMAN BEING, as presented in Kleparski (1997), provides historical counter-evidence to such views as that of Dirven (1985:97), who clearly underestimates the scope of the operation of metonymic transfers based on the relationship between the article of dress and the wearer of the article<sup>1</sup>.

Cognitive approach stresses that semantic structures at all levels may be characterised relative to cognitive domains, which in Kleparski (1997) are understood as **CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS (CDs)**. In Kleparski (1997) the semantics of lexical categories related to the conceptual macrocategory FEMALE HUMAN BEING is set against and investigated by means of a network of **CDs**. More precisely, the semantic content of lexical categories is

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast, this common type of relation, which may be labelled part-whole relation, has been given much attention in Warren (1992).

characterised, defined and compared with respect to different locations within attributive paths of various **CDs**<sup>2</sup>. As understood in Kleparski (1997), the notion of **CD** implies an open set of attributive **values** (or **elements**), which are specified for different locations within its **attributive path**. In other words, attributive paths specified for **CDs** are viewed as conceptual dimensions along which the meanings are regarded as similar or different<sup>3</sup>.

Obviously, the lexical categories that are highlighted for the attributive value (**FEMALE**) are related to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** in various ways. Some of them are merely related to the central area of the conceptual macrocategory (e.g., monosemous synonyms of *girl/young woman*, *woman* and *old woman*), while others are linked to its various peripheral regions such as, for example, **EVIL FEMALE** (e.g. *virago*), **IMMORAL FEMALE** (e.g. *call-girl*) or **FEMALE SERVANT** (e.g. *maid*). Moreover, there is a number of historical synonyms of *girl/young woman*, *woman*, and *old woman*, whose semantics – apart from being related to various regions of the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** – is linked to other, frequently very distant conceptual categories such as, for example, **BIRD** (e.g., *bird* used in the sense ‘girl, young woman’), **HORSE** (e.g., *harridan* used in the sense ‘repulsive-looking (old) woman’), **FISH** (e.g., *backfish* used in the sense ‘(young) woman’) or **CLOTHES** (e.g., *petticoat* used in the sense ‘woman’).

Kleparski (1997) elaborates on the notion of **onomasiological substitution** which is viewed as the process resulting from establishing an onomasiological path, i.e., a kind of conceptual link that pieces together selected conceptual elements of a given semantic structure with a particular lexical category. Following the analytical frame worked out in Kleparski (1997) one may say that the process of establishing the onomasiological link between the semantic poles of those lexical categories, primarily associated with the conceptual category **CLOTHES** and – secondarily – the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** results in highlighting different values specific to the attributive paths of different **CDs**. And so, in such cases as *bikini*, *monokini*, which may contextually acquire the sense ‘the female wearing bikini/monokini’,

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<sup>2</sup> The description of the lexical categories related to the macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** requires a number of category-specific **CDs** such as, for example, **DOMAIN OF SEX [...]**, **DOMAIN OF AGE [...]**, **DOMAIN OF PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND APPEARANCE [...]**, **DOMAIN OF ORIGIN AND RANK [...]**, **DOMAIN OF FUNCTIONS [...]**, **DOMAIN OF DRESS [...]**, **DOMAIN OF CHARACTER, BEHAVIOUR AND MORALITY [...]**, but some other **CDs** may be needed in the analysis of metaphorical and metonymic uses of such expressions as, for example, *bitch*, *cow*, *chick*, *petticoat* and *skirt* which are basically associated with other, frequently very distant conceptual categories, such as **ANIMAL** or **CLOTHES**.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Taylor (1990:63).

the overt onomasiological link is formed between the semantic poles of *bikini*, *monokini* and **DOMAIN OF DRESS** [...] that may be required for the description of lexical categories related to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**. In this way *bikini* and *monokini* become linked to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**.

The aim set to the pages that follow is not to dwell on any theoretical issues, but rather to visualise the practical impact of the process of metonymic extension and, in particular, the role of personal names in the historical growth of the body of lexical categories related to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**. However, it is fairly evident that such theoretical issues as the relation between the notions of lexical category and conceptual category as well as the correlation between various conceptual categories (microcategories vs. macrocategories) require more attention, if not separate analysis.

### On metonymy

History of mankind clearly shows that it is very common for language users to take one well-established or easily perceived aspect of something and employ it to stand either for the thing as a whole or for some aspect or part of it (see Lakoff (1987:77)). In rhetoric the process of metonymy is viewed as a figure of speech in which the name of an attribute or adjunct is substituted for that of the thing meant. Sometimes, metonymy is treated as a subtype of metaphor<sup>4</sup>.

As we understand it, **metonymy** is a metaphorical process, whereby one entity comes to stand in place of some other entity due to their various intrinsic conceptual relationships. The classification of types of metonymy is most often based on an identification of the target and source concepts involved. As pointed out by Dirven (1985:97), metonymic relationships may, among other things, hold between a symbol and the person it stands for (e.g., *the Crown* = 'the British Monarch', *the Scalpel* = 'scalpel-happy medical doctor'), container and the contained (e.g., *dish* = 'food', *kettle* = 'contents of a kettle', *wardrobe* = 'person's collection of clothes'), an article of dress and the wearer of this article (e.g., *monokini* = 'girl wearing monokini'), and the author and his work (e.g., *Shakespeare* = 'work by Shakespeare'). Another type of metonymic relationship is the one whereby a part of an appliance comes to stand for the appliance itself (e.g., *tube* = 'television set')<sup>5</sup>.

Notice that the operative basis of metonymy seems to be entirely different from that of metaphor because metonymy is not based on the mechanism of

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Hock (1986:285).

<sup>5</sup> On this issue see Norrick (1979).

overall resemblance between the metonymical and the original concept, but rather the working of metonymy is based on real-world contiguity between objects (cf. Taylor (1990:122)). Wells (1977) stresses yet another difference between metonymy and metaphor: the former is much more bound to an extralinguistic situation; while most metaphors can be understood fairly well without interlocutor's knowing anything about the extralinguistic situations in which the process of metaphor occurs, metonyms require a knowledge of these circumstances. Following Taylor (1990) and Kleparski (1997), we consider metonymic transfers as special cases of **perspectivisation**, whereby some covertly or overtly present attributive value or values come(s) to the forefront, while other attributive values are not only backgrounded but, in fact, may be suppressed completely.

The analysis carried out in Kleparski (1997) provides a good number of historical metonymic transfers from the conceptual category **CLOTHES** to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** in which perspectivisation seems to have played a significant role. Thus, for example, the semantic poles of *stammel*, *skirt* and *placket* are primarily grounded in the conceptual category **CLOTHES**. It is through the operation of metonymy that, at a certain stage of their evolution, the semantic poles of these and other lexical categories became associated with the conceptual category **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**.

### **CLOTHES and FEMALE HUMAN BEING**

When we focus our attention on the historical synonyms of *woman*, we see a number of metonymic transfers that have contributed to the growth of the **onomasiological dictionary** associated with the central region of the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** such as, *strap*, *murrey-kersey*, *skirt*, *smock*, *petticoat* and *placket*<sup>6</sup>. The history of these lexical categories, originally linked to the conceptual category **CLOTHES**, exemplifies metonymic derivation of both evaluatively neutral and evaluatively charged female-specific senses.

The history of *strap* ultimately goes back to Anglo-Saxon *stropp* 'leather band'. The word appears in the late 17th century in the sense 'strap of lady's clothes' (17th>Mod.E.). In Irish English the lexical category is recorded from the middle of the 19th century as a term of abuse applied to women ((1842) LOVER Handy Andy ii, 'You infernal old *strap*!' shouted he, as he clutched

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<sup>6</sup> Onomasiological dictionary **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**, as understood in Kleparski (1997), comprises all the lexical categories that have been used in the sense 'woman' at any stage of the development of English.

up a handful of bottles..and flung them at the nurse. > (C. 1848) J. KEEGAN Leg. & Poems (1907) 454 You lie, you Orange *strap*..you were insulting every one you met.).

The compound *murrey-kersey* is a combination of *murrey* ‘dark red’, probably going back to O.F. *moreé* ‘dark-red colour’ (cf. Mod.It. *morato*, Mod.Sp. *morado* ‘mulberry coloured’, both going back ultimately to Lat. *morus* ‘mulberry’), and *kersey* used in the sense ‘coarse, narrow cloth’, originally probably a name of the village *Kersey* in Suffolk where this kind of coarse cloth was manufactured. The compound is recorded at the beginning of the 17th century as a term of contempt for women ((1607) *MIDDLETON Michaelm. Term I. i*, Let her pass me; I’ll take no notice of her,—scurvy *murrey kersey*.).

Another example is the semantic history of E.Mod.E. *skirt* which is documented in the sense ‘woman’. Noticeably, the evidence for the 17th and 18th century use of *skirt* in this sense is fragmentary, but the human-specific secondary sense was revived in the second part of the 19th century since when the category has been richly documented in the sense ‘woman, esp. an attractive one’, either collectively or individually, particularly in such phrases as *a bit of skirt* ((1560) *ROLLAND Seven Sages* 52 Now thow thy tale hes tauld,..Bot not gottin thow wald, licht *skirt* for all thy skippis. > (1974) *K. MILLETT Flying* (1975) v. 469 The two patriarchs, never tired of chasing twenty-year-old *skirts* in their old age.).

Yet another example is the case of *smock* which appears in English already during the O.E. stage in the sense ‘woman’s undergarment, a shift or chemise’ (O.E.>Mod.E.). Scanty as they are, the *OED* quotations show that at the end of the 16th century *smock* acquired the sense ‘woman’ ((1591) *GREENE Conny Catch. I. Wks. (Grosart)* X. 60 The Collier..said he would be tried by the verdict of the *smock*. > (1693) *SHADWELL Volunteers III. i*, Thou wert a pretty Fellow, to rebel all thy Life-time against Princes, and trail a Pike under a *Smock-Rampant* at last!).

The Romance lexical category *petticoat*, meaning literally ‘little or small coat’, entered the English language during the course of the 15th century (15th>Mod.E.) in the sense ‘female underwear’. At the beginning of the 17th century *petticoat* is first recorded in the sense ‘woman’, the referent being viewed as the female wearer of a petticoat ((1600) *SHAKS. A.Y.L. II. iv. 7* But I must comfort the weaker vessell, as doublet and hose ought to show it selfe coragious to *petty-coate*. > (1898) *Daily News* 1 Aug. 4/7 There was as much

force as brutality in his [Bismarck's] exclamation that the Emperor Frederick's death would put an end to the rule of 'petticoats in politics'<sup>7</sup>.

A similar example is provided by the history of *placket*, sometimes treated as a phonetic distortion of *placard* 'piece of armour' (see the *OED*), ultimately going back to Mod.D. *plakken* 'to piece or stick together', with a diminutive suffix *-et*. In the history of English *placket* appears at the beginning of the 17th century in the sense 'apron or petticoat' and, for the same period, we find records testifying to the transferred sense 'woman', in which woman is viewed as the wearer of a garment, though the contexts provided by the *OED* do not always allow us to distinguish the two senses ((1606) *SHAKS. Tr. & Cr. II. iii. 22* The curse dependant on those that warre for a *placket*. > (1881) *DUFFIELD Don Quix. II. 493* A farthingale and *placket* [Sp. *saboyanas de seda*] instead of her grey petticoat.).

### Personal names and FEMALE HUMAN BEING

Another interesting mechanism clearly observable in the analysis of the data is the process of formation of senses variously related to the conceptual macrocategory FEMALE HUMAN BEING from the category of personal names. This phenomenon is treated in Klepanski (1997) as a subtype of metonymy, whereby the personal name comes to be used with respect to the whole class of referents. Obviously, the process is not restricted to the English language. In Polish and French common names, both female and male, such as *Zośka, Maryśka, Tamara, Swietłana, Marie, Jean* are occasionally, especially in colloquial and vulgar registers, used in the sense of 'woman' or 'man' in such contexts as the following ones:

Mam dosyć głuchych telefonów od tych wszystkich twoich *zosiek* i *marysiek*! 'I am fed with all those dead phones from your women (lovers)!', where female personal names *Zośka* and *Maryśka* are used in the sense 'woman'.

Pierwszą rzeczą jaka uderzyła mnie na dworcu w Przemyślu była cała ta masa *tamar* i *swietlan* objuczonych plastikowymi torbami. 'The first thing that struck me at Przemyśl railway station was the multitude of Russian/Ukrainian women carrying plastic bags', where female personal names *Tamara* and *Swietłana* are used in the sense 'Russian/Ukrainian woman'.

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<sup>7</sup> Carstensen (1959:437) says: "[...] Ebenfalls ein Synonym für Frau wurde *petticoat* [...], das das NED bis 1542 als männliches Bekleidungsstück belegt. *Petticoat(s)* wurde dann aber zum (speziell) weiblichen Begriff und schliesslich zum Symbol für das weibliche Geschlecht überhaupt."

*Marie* couche – toi la! ‘Woman, lie down!’, where a common female French name *Marie* is used in the general sense ‘woman’.

*Jean* – fautre! ‘Buzz off, man/mister!’, where a common male name *Jean* is used indiscriminately to men bearing any name and thus the ensuing sense is that of ‘man’.

As shown in Kleparski (1997), in the history of English this type of derivation of synonyms of *girl/young woman*, *woman* and *old woman* started during the Mid.E. period (e.g., the development of *gill/jill*), and the process was markedly intensified during the Mod.E. period. The most spectacular cases of the development in question are those of *jug*, *moll*, *maud*, *jilt*, *sheila*, *biddy*, *judy*, *jane* and *Richard*<sup>8</sup>.

According to the representative sources, *gill/jill* is first recorded in the sense ‘young woman’ during the close of the Mid.E. period. All major etymological sources (see, for example, Skeat’s *Dictionary*) view *gill/jill* as an English adaptation of the French name *Juliane*. This lexical category is recorded in the sense ‘young woman’, most frequently with familiar or contemptuous overtones, from the middle of the 15th century till the middle of the 17th century ((C. 1460) *Towneley Myst.* iii. 219 *Noah* [to his wife]. Haue at the, *gill*. > (1665) *J. WILSON Project. I. Dra Wks.* (1874) 228 *Mrs. Got.* Sirrah..look out and mind your business..*Got.* Good faith, I do. *Mrs. Got.* Yes, among your *gills* too much!)<sup>9</sup>.

The etymology of *jug* is by no means clear but the sense ‘(homely) woman, esp. sweetheart’, with which the lexical category associated at the end of the 16th century, is supposed by the *OED*, Skeat’s *Dictionary* and Espy (1978:208) to have originated as a pet name or familiar substitute for the popular feminine name *Joan/Joanna*,<sup>10</sup> applied as a common noun or simply as a term of disparagement ((1569) *PRESTON Cambyses* in Hazl. *Dodsley IV.* 183 *Ruff.* I will give thee sixpence to lie one night with thee. *Mer.* Gogs heart, slave, dost thou think I

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<sup>8</sup> The only male personal name *Richard*, the shortening of *Richard the Third*, rhyming slang for *bird*, used in the sense ‘girl’, is recorded in the sense ‘girl, woman’ from the middle of the 20th century ((1950) *P. TEMPEST Lag’s Lexicon* 180 *Richard.* A girl. The girl friend. > (1970) *G. F. NEWMAN Sir, You Bastard* viii. 232, I was just sleeping at this *Richard’s* place during the day.. I didn’t know she was brassing.).

<sup>9</sup> However, one may conjecture that the sense ‘young woman’ may have gained wide currency earlier than the first record found in the *OED*. This supposition gains some credibility on account of the fact that by the middle of the 15th century *gill/jill* is found in the proverbial expressions *Jack and Jill*, used in the sense ‘man and woman’ and *Jack must* (or *will*) *have his Jill*, first documented in the 16th century (A. 1529 *SKELTON Magnyf.* 290 What auayleth Lordshyp, yourselfe for to kylle with care and with thought howe *Jacke shalle haue Gyl* ). Also, the fact that in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* the category *gill* appears in a number of syntagmatic combinations, e.g., *gilt-flirt* and *flirt-gilt*, meaning ‘wanton woman’, seems to suggest that *gill* may have been well-established in the system much earlier.

<sup>10</sup> Alternately, Partridge (1950) conjectures that *jug* derives from *Jug*, a pet form of *Judith*.

am a sixpenny *jug*? > (1707) *MRS. CENTLIVRE Platon. Lady* 111, But hark ye, don't you marry that ill-manner'd *Jug*, the Relict of a cheating old rogue.).

According to the *OED*, *moll* originated as a familiar diminutive form of *Mary*. As a female personal name the category appears in English in the middle of the 16th century. From the early 17th century *moll* has been variously applied to women with the dominant senses 'woman of the demimonde', or 'prostitute' ((1604) *MIDDLETON Father Hubbard's T. Wks. (Bullen) VIII. 78* None of these common *Molls* neither, but discontented and unfortunate gentlewomen. > (1975) *C. FREMLIN C. Shadow xxvi. 190* The Psychopath's *Moll*. I'm doing it again, thought Imogen..saving him from the consequences of his follies.).

The *OED* informs us that *maud* was originally a diminutive form coined on the feminine name *Mahald* (and ultimately *Matilda*). Espy (1978:207) states that the name *Mahald* was from its beginnings used as a slurring reference to women though no evidence for this conjecture could be obtained. The lexical category *maud* is recorded in the sense 'old woman, hag' in the first half of the 16th century (1532 *MORE Confut. Tindale Wks. 685/1* So I see well Tindall meaneth for hys mother, some olde mother *mawde*.).

The lexical category *jilt* is regarded by the majority of etymological sources to be a contraction of *jillet*, a diminutive form of a personal name *Jill*. *Jilt* made its appearance in English in the second half of the 17th century (1672>1815) with two basic senses, i.e., 'harlot, strumpet' and 'deceiving, capricious lover' (1674>1845). Also, in Sc.E., *jilt* is found in two early 19th century quotations as a contemptuous term for a young woman (1816 *SCOTT Old Mort. viii*, Though she's but a dirty *jilt*.).

The origin of *sheila* is unknown, though most frequently it is assumed to represent a generic use of the originally Irish personal name *Sheila*, the counterpart of masculine *Paddy*. According to Partridge (1950), the original Australian form *sheiler* represents the English dialectal form *shaler* current in the sense 'girl' from the early 19th century. The lexical category is richly recorded, chiefly in Au.E. and N.Z.E., first at the beginning of the 19th century (1828>Mod.E.), in the sense 'girl, young woman', playfully affectionate and predominantly in male use ((1828) *Monitor (Sydney) 22 Mar. 1053/2* Many a piteous *Shela* stood wiping the gory locks of her Paddy, until released from that duty by the officious interference of the knight of the baton. > (1977) *D. SEAMAN Committee 63* They made the usual jokes about the local *Sheilas*.).

According to the *OED* and Espy (1978:196), *biddy* is a familiar abbreviation of the common Irish female name *Bridget*. This lexical category is first recorded at the beginning of the 18th century (1708>Mod.E.) in the sense 'Irish maid-servant'. At the end of the 18th century *biddy* appears in the generalised sense 'woman' with a good deal of derogatory implication, the sense which, as the *OED* citations show, became widespread in the 20th century ((1785) *GROSE Vulg. Tongue, Biddy*, or *Chick-a-biddy*, a chicken, and



figuratively a young wench. > (1960) *C. P. SNOW* *Affair* xl. 368, I believe she's the bloodiest awful specimen of a party *bid*dy.).

Espy (1978:59), Withycombe's *Dictionary* and other etymological sources agree that the expression *judy* is a familiar pet-form of the female name *Judith*. Although the name seems to have been present in English since the O.E. period, it was popularised in the 19th century as *Judy* the wife of *Punch* in the popular puppet show *Punch and Judy*. Since the beginning of the 19th century (1812>1973), in well-documented slang usage *judy* has been used disparagingly in the sense 'girl, woman', later without the earlier implication of opprobrium ((1812) *J.H VAUX* *Flash Dict.*, *Judy*, a blowen; but sometimes used when speaking familiarly of any woman. > (1973) *Guardian* 31 May 13/7 During a strike a man whose *judy* is working is obviously better off than the man with a wife and three kids about the house.).

Similarly, the female Christian name *Jane* started to be used in the well-documented sense 'girl, woman', originally in A.E. slang at the beginning of the 20th century (1906 *Dialect Notes* III. 142 'It's the magazine over yonder with a red *Jane* on it.' 'Going to take your *Jane* to the show?' > 1967 *E. S. GARDNER* *Case of Queenly Contestant* (1973) xiii. 150 'Who was this *jane*? Anybody I know?' 'No one you know. She had been a nurse in San Francisco.').

In the foregoing an attempt was made to visualise the impact of the mechanism of metonymy on the development of senses related to various regions of the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**. In particular, as could be observed, the role of metonymy in the rise of lexical meanings related to the centre of the macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**, that is the rise of historical synonyms of *girl/young woman*, *woman* and *old woman* is not to be underestimated. The examples of real-world-contiguity based transfers from the conceptual category **CLOTHES** to the conceptual macrocategory **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**, as well as the formation of the sense 'girl, woman' attached to various alternative forms of female proper names are richly documented in the history of English. This type of development is observable at various stages of the development of English, though it seems to have been particularly operative during the Mod.E. period.

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