

PAWEŁ GOLDA

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Linguistics

ORCID: 0000-0001-5505-7731

pawel.golda@us.edu.pl

MARLENA MOSKAL

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Linguistics

ORCID: 0000-0002-8935-503X

marlena.moskal@us.edu.pl

AGNIESZKA JEDZINIAK-DANOWSKA

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Linguistics

ORCID: 0000-0002-1163-4936

agnieszka.jedziniak-danowska@us.edu.pl

JOANNA RYSZKA

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Linguistics

ORCID: 0000-0002-5142-3949

joanna.ryszka@us.edu.pl

NAMING THE NAMELESS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF BYNAMES FOR THE DECEASED FROM AN ONOMASTIC PERSPECTIVE

The article proposes a new term, *postmortonyms*, denoting names assigned to unidentified deceased individuals. Drawing on an exemplary semantic onomastic analysis of 220 postmortonyms from multiple cultures, the study explores the motivations, structures, and functions of these bynames, distinct from *posthumous names*, *deadnames*, and *necronyms*. The research demonstrates that postmortonyms often incorporate details such as location or distinguishing features, which serve investigative, communicative, and memorial purposes. The analysis highlights the phenomenon of polyonymy, in which temporary names coexist with potential authentic identities, and discusses the broader cultural and legal contexts that influence naming practices for the nameless dead. The research is a preliminary study, and the findings provide a foundation for further research on the conceptualization of death and naming across cultures.

Keywords: onomastics, proper noun, name, onyms, postmortonym, nickname, byname, death

1. Introduction

The urge to name is a fundamental human trait, reflecting our need to categorize, communicate, and make sense of the world. It stems from the fact that “[t]he unnamed is the unnoticed, and the unnoticed is for cognitive and communicative purposes nonexistent” (Algeo and Algeo 2000: 265). Moreover, according to Bright (2003: 674), “the use of personal names, having varying levels of descriptiveness, is a sociolinguistic universal of the human species.” Thus, names can be regarded as social phenomena (Ernst 2010: 61). Consequently, it is deeply human to assign names even to the dead, particularly in the absence of an established identity. Such units fall within the domain of onomastics, the scientific study of proper names (or onyms), which explores their social, cultural, historical, and psychological significance.

Naturally, death is a taboo subject in many cultures; yet, it did not stop these cultures from establishing social rules that often emphasize respect for the deceased, following both legal provisions (cf. British Common Law) and the Latin aphorism *de mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est*. Therefore, some legal systems have established guidelines for referring to individuals whose names are unknown or cannot be disclosed. For instance, Order No. 48 of the Chief Commander of Police dated June 28, 2018, stipulates that in Poland, the term *NN zwłoki* (‘NN dead body’) should be used for unidentified bodies. Whereas in English-speaking countries, placeholders such as *John* and *Jane Doe* or *Richard Roe* (e.g. Bryant 1957; Felton 1972) are used as “specified names of unspecified identities” (LeMay 1995: 643). However, these guidelines are not always sufficient, leading to the creation of new, distinct names that circulate in both the mass media and official institutions.

In our study, we refer to the names assigned to unidentified deceased individuals as *postmortonyms* (hereinafter, PMOs) – a term we propose due to the absence of an appropriate one in the onomastic literature. As the analysis shows, these names often incorporate specific details, such as the location of discovery or distinguishing physical features. Furthermore, these names may serve multiple purposes: they help differentiate between cases, aid law enforcement and forensic investigation, and attract media attention through memorability. Thus, in their purpose and use, they are significantly different from *posthumous names* (Nordvall 2020), *deadnames* (Koles 2024), and *necronyms* (Testoni *et al.* 2020; Gałkowski 2024). Moreover, despite general interest in the onomastics (Hough (ed.) 2016), PMOs have not been studied yet, contrary to other investigation-related names, e.g. the aliases of criminals (e.g. Golda and Mężyk 2021) or nicknames (e.g. Leslie and Skipper 1990), which are typologically similar to PMOs.

The following onomastic analysis examines 220 PMOs from various cultures and languages, focusing on their structure and semantic properties. While some discourse analyses have explored the use of *John* and *Jane Doe* (e.g. Klaidman

and Beauchamp 1986; Ehrlich 2021), these studies focus on specific cases rather than on naming systems and the structure of names. This research aims to address the outlined gap by offering a semantic onomastic analysis of PMOs, a new onymic category. Moreover, the present analysis serves as a starting point for a discussion on different approaches to the conceptualisations of death, with the aim of broadening the perspective to include other cultures in future comparative analyses.

With regard to the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic dimensions of this research, in the era of globally shared media and the growing popularity of true crime, cases involving unidentified deceased individuals are often highly mediated across different countries, giving them a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic character. This is reflected in the lack of translations in many instances, as the name of a case already circulates in English. Moreover, death itself is both a cultural and universal phenomenon, independent of language, which justifies the introduction of a new term, *postmortonym*. If the research were conducted on the material from one language, there would be a risk of creating a concept limited to a single linguistic and cultural context. However, by the inclusion of multiple cultures and codes we aim at supporting the legitimacy of introducing this term.

2. Theoretical Framework

The interest in proper names has a long history and has preoccupied philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Gottlob Frege. Consequently, various scholars have attempted to understand the role of a name – for example, whether it carries both connotative and denotative meaning (as in the Millian theory), and whether different proper names referring to the same entity are truly synonymous (as discussed in sense-based theories of names). Naturally, these questions and theories remain under debate, but many linguists (e.g. Del Pinal 2015; Lederman 2021) continue to engage with them to provide a broader perspective on the complexity of proper names.

In anthropology, names are of paramount importance, as understanding how communities bestow them “provides a grasp of the community’s understanding of identity, kinship, genealogy, and social life” (De Stefani 2016: 54). This relevance is highlighted by linguists who say that

“[p]roper names are not only linguistic signs – they are also social constructs, often strongly ideologized, entering into numerous text and discourse relations, forming both formal and semantic-connotational, or metaphorical-metonymic series, playing in many cases a key role in (re)constructing social reality” (Rutkowski and Skowronek 2019: 49).

Moreover, proper names play a crucial role in the discussions of reference because they fundamentally identify and differentiate, as they refer to a specific person, object, or phenomenon, i.e. a specific referent. Thus, a proper name, as a designation of an unambiguous onymic object, should be considered in a specific onymic context and situation (Sičáková 2002).

The language's anthroponymic system is highly diverse, encompassing various classes of human names. Among these, in addition to the first and last names (i.e. prosoponyms), are pseudonyms and nicknames (cf. *bynames* in Brylla 2016), which serve as their *substitutes* in different communicative situations and social contexts, and are often created for specific purposes. In other words, the “[u]se of certain names under particular circumstances may be forbidden by religious taboo; or then again, such names may be replaced by descriptive nicknames” (Bright 2003: 672). However, the relationship between pseudonyms and nicknames to the first name and last name can vary. As Aleksiejuk (2014: 249) notes

[p]seudonyms do substitute – they are false names that play the role of the real ones, and are used instead. In turn, nicknames can be described as supplementary – they supplement a selection of alternative identification devices – depending on the social situation we can use, for example, a given name, a surname, a title or a nickname.

A pseudonym, a self-given name (Aleksiejuk 2016: 448), is adopted with the intention of hiding one's identity, recognized by the first name and last name, and various motivations are indicated for its creation: personal, ideological, conditioned by custom or prevailing trend, and forced by the political or social situation (Cieślíkowa 1998a: 135-136). On the other hand, according to Cieślíkowa (1998b: 122), the existence of a nickname is supported by the author's need to externalize their attitude towards another person, the bearer. Therefore, it is said that nicknames “tend to have strong emotive connotations” (Van Langendonck and Van de Velde 2016: 32). Moreover, the material for both pseudonyms and nicknames is an abundant repertoire of linguistic forms (cf. Cieślíkowa 1998a, 1998b) and “[w]ithin that identification may be communicated a sense of relationship, purpose, or social characterization” (Leslie and Skipper 1990: 277).

However, research in the field of anthroponomastics lacks findings on the names assigned to deceased individuals when their real identity, indicated by first and last name, is somehow unknown. As Gałkowski (2024) mentions, the term *onym* is extremely productive and actively used as a compositional element combined with various thematic terms that semantically lead to different sections of onomastics and different classes of onyms (Gałkowski 2024: 14). We therefore propose, for the purposes of this study and others of a similar nature, to distinguish a *postmortonym* (from Latin *post mortem* ‘after death’ and Greek *onoma* ‘name’) within anthroponymy as a naming unit used to refer to the unidentified deceased. We assume that a *postmortonym* is a postmortem byname,

fictional, non-authentic onym assigned to a deceased person, whose true and authentic name is (at least initially) unknown. It is given to the individual by themselves, by society, by the media (primarily the internet, press, TV, true crime podcasts, etc.), or by institutions (courts, law enforcement agencies, such as the prosecution and police), formally or informally. Such a name must be comprehensible to the broader linguistic community or at least a part of it, repeatable and reproducible, and should unambiguously refer to that specific deceased individual.

PMOs may therefore share some features with other classes of anthroponymic names, such as the above-mentioned pseudonyms or nicknames. They are units that exist alongside the proper (usually unknown) anthroponyms identifying the deceased, but they are created in specific social and communicative conditions and for a particular purpose, and therefore, they function as name substitutes.

Moreover, PMOs, due to their sphere of occurrence, are thematically, not denotatively, similar to necronyms (from Greek *necros* ‘dead’ and *onoma* ‘name’), which are either proper names of necropolises or names given to newborns after deceased relatives in order to honor them (Caffarelli and Gagliardi 2018: 37; Gałkowski 2024: 22). The issue of necronyms, in the second sense, is taken up by anthropologists, who draw attention to the fact that in different cultures, “death-names” are treated differently, and are associated with local traditions as well as taboos (Testoni *et al.* 2020). Gałkowski, on the other hand, places necronyms in the group of onymic terms whose status is still debated; they have not gained recommendations in onomastics studies and have not been widely accepted in research works (Gałkowski 2024: 22). Furthermore, as PMOs are mainly used in the mass media and the criminal cases they cover, they should be considered in the thematic vicinity of investigation-related names, e.g. the aliases of criminals (see Golda and Mężyk 2021). However, it would be erroneous to assume that postmortem bynames are exclusively associated with criminal cases. They may also be assigned, for instance, to ancient mummies or bodies recovered in high-altitude mountain regions whose true identities remain unknown.

Lastly, the emergence of a PMO is associated with the multiplication of names indicating one referent, which thus requires an understanding of the problem of the multiplicity of names. The term *polyonymy* originally referred to the use of more than one name within an anthroponymic system (Bijak 2016: 55). Over time, it was extended to other branches of onomastic studies, especially toponomastics, where the phenomenon of multiple names gained various terms, e.g. *polymorphism* (*dimorphism*), *naming parallelism*, *variantness*, *duality of naming acts* or *naming alterations* (Bijak 2016: 55-56). We understand polyonymy similarly to Bijak (2016) and earlier Krško (2003), as any instability and variability in a name referring to one referent, consisting in changes within the

onym itself, its phonetic or grammatical form, as well as in the creation of a new name with a different motivation. The issue of variety primarily falls within the scope of socio-onomastics, the branch of onomastics that acknowledges that onymic variables are mainly shaped by different societal and cultural registers (Nicolaisen 1985: 123). In terms of the analyzed material, the last possibility is vital, i.e. the creation of a new name with a different motivation and in a strictly defined nomination context. The newly created units (postmortonyms) thus enter into a relationship with officially standardized and sanctioned names, i.e. the first and last names of the deceased, which have not yet been identified during the ongoing investigation. Therefore, a PMO exists temporarily alongside an unknown proper anthroponym that establishes the identity of the deceased, while the relationship between these names operates primarily on two levels: the social (official vs. unofficial name) and the codificational (standardized vs. non-standardized name). Thus, we treat the phenomenon of polyonymy as a particular synonymous relation in which the uses of specific onyms are conditioned by the social and institutional situation of use. It is impossible to ignore this phenomenon, especially when the identity of the deceased is finally established during the ongoing investigation. Additionally, it seems that the PMO becomes independent over time, functioning in the media sphere alongside the proper name, such as first and last name, to prove the individual's identity.

3. Methodology

As previously stated, this study aims to validate the existence of the term *postmortonym* by the analysis of specific examples of this phenomenon. Accordingly, we began by collecting 220 units that fulfilled the proposed definition of PMO. The postmortonyms were primarily collected from the Interpol website, Wikipedia, and Unidentified Wiki. The last one is a website “dedicated to unidentified individuals [...] as well as formerly unidentified persons”, which hosts the largest publicly available database of unidentified individuals, including their PMOs. To ensure the validity of the collected (potential) PMOs, each one was checked and verified in other sources. Only the bynames that appeared in at least three other sources were included in the data. Once the data had been gathered, they were organized in a table accessible online (Golda *et al.* 2026) – importantly, the analyses below follow the source spelling.

The data table includes essential information for each analyzed unit: translation into English (if applicable), disambiguation, source, country, gender, and whether the unit refers to a child. In this article, the term *child* refers to a young human being who has not yet reached adulthood; that is, a person in the early stages of physical and mental development, from birth to adulthood. It must be acknowledged that, in many cases of nameless bodies, the lack of identity does

not help determine whether the individual was a child (often, only an approximate age range, e.g. 15-25 years, can be specified). For this reason, we have also adopted the category *possibly a child* in our data table.

It should be noted that the search was not limited to English-language units, although they constitute the majority of our research data – all non-English units have been translated into English. The multilingual and multicultural nature of this research constitutes both an asset and a limitation. On the one hand, it demonstrates that PMOs are a universal phenomenon, appearing in diverse languages and cultures (e.g. English, French, Polish, and Japanese), which aligns with our objective of introducing this new category of proper names. The distribution by country of the sourced units is as follows: Argentina: 1, Australia: 5, Belgium: 11, Brazil: 4, Canada: 4, Czech Republic: 1, Denmark: 2, France: 7, Germany: 11, Indonesia: 1, Ireland: 3, Israel: 1, Italy: 6, Japan: 7, Netherlands: 15, Norway: 2, Pakistan: 2, Poland: 4, South Korea: 1, Spain: 10, Tibet: 1, UK: 10, USA: 111. On the other hand, the research's multilingual material complicates the analysis of the structural patterns presented later in the article.

The analytical part of this study is grounded in two types of analysis: semantic and structural. Semantic analysis allows linguists to explore the principles that govern the construction of meaning, focusing on the relationships between expressions and the concepts they represent (Cruse 2011). This framework was applied to examine the references, possible etymology, and motivations behind PMOs. In this analysis, if possible, we establish the basic connotative meanings according to the four types discussed by Van Langendonck and Van de Velde (2016: 31-32). Importantly, as suggested by Brylla (2016: 250), the analysis of historical data “involves the risk of speculation and misinterpretation [...] since it is not always easy to find naming motives.” This remark also applies to data that cannot be verified by the author. Therefore, in the section *Culture*, we propose some potential references that may not have influenced the origin of the PMO.

The structural analysis, in turn, aims to identify and describe recurring structural patterns observed in these linguistic units. The rationale for this analysis is rooted in the idea that “the semantic status of names is mirrored by certain syntactic (called ‘symbolic’) constructions” (Van Langendonck and Van de Velde 2016: 17). Importantly, due to the pilot nature of the study and its focus on the category of PMOs, the analysis remains fairly simplistic in form and deserves further, more detailed investigation – for instance, through the application of the categories, criteria, and terminology discussed by Aleksiejuk (2016) for the analysis of pseudonyms.

The sources used in the research are all openly and freely accessible on the Internet. We did not have access to any case files and based our research exclusively on information readily available in news articles and other digital sources.

4. Semantic analysis

4.1. Anthroponyms

As the material shows, postmortonyms incorporate anthroponyms, including both first names and last names. However, the anthroponyms observed in PMOs are notably heterogeneous. The most prevalent and significant examples identified within the collected data are *John Doe* and *Jane Doe*. Among the collected data, there are instances of both *John Doe* and *Jane Doe*, with specific variations such as *Bulldog John Doe*, *Bibb County John Doe*, and *San Mateo County John Doe*, as well as *The St. Louis Jane Doe*, *Tujunga Jane Doe*, and *Wexford Jane Doe*.

There are also cases where the names *John Doe* or *Jane Doe* are followed by a number, such as *Jane Doe #40* (also spelled *Jane Doe 40* or *Jane Doe No. 40*). Interestingly, this PMO was used twice: for a female body found on October 1, 1976, in San Francisco (California), later identified, and for a female body found on May 28, 1974, in Long Beach (California), which remains unidentified. The case of *Mary Doe-four* – a combination of *Doe* and the numeral *four* – illustrates a similar phenomenon. This designation was assigned to an elderly woman who died in March 1978 at Queenwood East Nursing Home in Illinois. Her true identity had remained unknown for four decades, during which she spent time in various institutions. Throughout her institutionalization, the name *Mary Doe-four* was repeatedly applied and ultimately became her postmortem identifier.

Remaining within the context of full names (i.e. [first name] + [last name]), we also observed examples such as *Jason Doe* (given to a deceased named after a note addressed to *Jason*), *Betty Boop* (given to a deceased found with a T-shirt featuring a picture of Betty Boop on the front), and *Elvis Frank* (given to a newborn found in a shoebox near the Elvis Presley bus stop in Rhode-Saint-Genève). Importantly, despite the presence of an anthroponym in the last PMO, it was derived from a place name (a bus stop) rather than from Elvis Presley himself.

Additionally, some instances of PMOs involve only first names, with female-related examples including *Horseshoe Harriet*, *Wych Elm Bella*, and *Baby Theresa*, and male examples such as *Fred the Head*, *Adam*, and *Coal Train Carlos*, including also diminutives, e.g. *Charlie* (*Charlie* is a short form of *Charles*), *Beth Doe* (*Beth* is a short form of *Elizabeth* or *Bethany*), *Castleberry Kate* (*Kate* is a short form of *Catherine*), and *Palisades Pete* and *Pipeline Pete* (*Pete* is a short form of *Peter*).

Interestingly, there are PMOs that incorporate initials or simply letters, e.g. 女性 X ('Woman X '), *Miss X*, and *Mister S*. The latter two examples incorporate titles such as *Mister* and *Miss*, and similar instances of PMOs can be observed in English, such as *Mister Somerton*, *Ms. Wiggins*, and *Ms. Startex*.

The final point to note is that the collected data allow us to conclude that some PMOs containing anthroponyms were assigned by police, investigators, or

journalists, such as *Eklutna Annie*, *Baby Theresa*, *Millie Doe*, and *Adam*. However, there are cases of names actually used by the deceased prior to their death that later became their PMOs, such as *Mary A. Anderson*, 吉田 慶子 ('Yoshida Keiko'), *Lyle Stevik*, and *Peter Bergmann*. Moreover, there are cases where nicknames given to individuals during their lifetime later became PMOs, such as *Mary Doefour*, *Six Shooter Jim*, or *Funny*. It is worth noting that in one case, a PMO, an anthroponym, was later confirmed to be the deceased's true name: *Monique*.

4.2. Location

In the collected examples of PMOs we can also observe the reference to the location where the deceased was found. Thus, they refer to natural features of the landscape and may include examples of hydronyms (i.e. names of bodies of water), oronyms (i.e. names of the mountains and hills), and urbonyms (i.e. names of the cities). Once again, this category of *nomen falsum* is highly heterogeneous. PMOs may also specify the exact location of discovery, while others provide an approximate reference. For example, *the Bolney Torso* was found near Bolney, while *Smyrna Doe* was discovered near Smyrna.

The PMOs that mention location use county names (i.e. choronyms), e.g. *Walker County Jane Doe*, *Miami County Jane Doe*, and *San Mateo County John Doe*. Other units within this category include city names where the nameless people were found or near which they were discovered, e.g. *the Kambo Man*, *Tempe Girl*, and *Chłopczyk z Cieszyna* ('the Boy from Cieszyn'). Additionally, PMOs can specify particular districts or neighborhoods within cities (i.e. urbanonyms), such as *Tujunga Jane Doe* (Los Angeles, USA), *Setiabudi 13* (Jakarta, Indonesia), and *Ueno John Doe* (Tokyo, Japan).

Several units refer to bodies of water, e.g. *the Girl in the River Main*, *the Woman in the Gaasp River*, *the Woman in the IJ River*, *Otonabee River Man* (a river), *the Woman in the Canal* (a canal), and *Delta Dawn* (a river delta). Moreover, the analyzed PMOs include names of islands, e.g. *the Gentleman of Heligoland* (discovered in the waters surrounding Heligoland), caves, e.g. *Trow Ghyll skeleton*, or are elevation-based, e.g. *Lady of the Hills* (a hill), *the Lady of the Dunes* (sand dunes), *The woman of Mount Artxanda* (a mountain), *Isdalskvinnen* ('The Isdal Woman', a valley). Notably, there are units referring to the beaches, e.g. *La Dama del Camello* ('The Lady of the Camello') and *Ballinamona Woman*, as well as the one referring to a bog, *The Body in the Bog*. PMOs are also derived from forests or park names, e.g. *The Burned Body in the Forest*, *Clocaenog Forest Man*, and *Angel of the Meadow* (based on the Angel Meadow public park in Manchester). However, they may also designate the general vegetation around the body, e.g. *Nude in the Nettles*, or include other common

nouns referring to the surroundings, e.g. *Mężczyzna ze ścieżki* ('The Man from the Path'), *The Woman on the Road*, *The Woman by the Motorway*, and *The Girl in the Parking Lot*. Therefore, PMOs can also refer to buildings, such as hotels, e.g. *Sahara Sue* (named after the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas), sheds, e.g. *Mill Creek Shed Man*, or industrial structures, e.g. *Pipeline Pete*.

4.3. Gender and stage of life

Postmortonyms may provide information about the gender or stage of life of the deceased. Regarding gender, PMOs, especially those in English, employ the terms *John Doe* and *Jane Doe*. Other examples contain personal names that inherently indicate masculinity or femininity, e.g. *Saja* (male) and *Viola* (female). Additionally, as previously discussed, some PMOs incorporate honorifics that specify gender, such as *mister* or *miss*, e.g. *Mr. X* and *Ms. Wiggins*.

PMOs also incorporate gender-specific nouns. For example, the noun *lady* is included in units such as *Lime Lady*, *Lady of the Lake*, and *The Lady in the Fridge*. Others employ general terms such as *man* or *woman* (or their equivalents in other languages) to indicate gender. Examples of male-associated PMOs include *Mill Creek Shed Man*, *Somerton Man*, and *Tamam Shud Man*, whereas female-associated examples include *Woman in the Trunk*, *Ballinamona Woman*, and *Isdalskvinnen* ('The Isdal Woman'). There are other gender-specific terms that indicate a specific sex. *The Gentleman of Heligoland* refers to a male, while *Princess Blue* and *Princess Doe* refer to a female. Additionally, *Cheerleader in the Trunk* uses the term *cheerleader*, which typically connotes a young female.

One may question the rationale for discussing gender and stage of life within a single section, as some PMOs simultaneously indicate both gender and possible age by incorporating terms such as *boy* or *girl* (or their equivalents in other languages). Examples containing *boy* (or its equivalents) include *Boy Under the Billboard*, *Chłopczyk z Cieszyna* ('The Boy from Cieszyn'), and *The Boy in the Box*. Similarly, examples incorporating *girl* (or its equivalents) include *Das Mädchen aus dem Main* ('The Girl from the Main'), *Lanaye Girl*, and 少女A ('Girl A').

In some cases, the stage of life – particularly young age and the fact that the individual was a child – is indicated through the use of the word *baby*, as in *Baby Jane*, *Baby Jane Doe*, and *Baby Elle*, or through the adjective *little*, as seen in *Little Zion Doe* and *Little Miss Nobody*, or *young*, e.g. *The young woman found in Saint-Denis*. Due to the inherent heterogeneity of PMOs, other creative units also exist, such as *Sweetie Doe*, which, similarly, refers to a young person.

However, it should be noted that a proper analysis of the incorporation of the terms *baby* and *girl* requires a detailed analysis of information about the case, since both of the terms may, by semantic extension, be used to refer to an adult woman to metaphorically denote her fragility.

4.4. Circumstances

As previously discussed, location is a crucial factor in forming PMOs and often remains an integral part of the discovery context. However, PMOs may reflect the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the body or the cause of death, e.g. *Paducah Plane Jumper*, who fell from the wing of a departing airplane. In some cases, even the specific condition in which the body was found is explicitly indicated in PMOs, e.g. *The Woman in the well*, *Nude in the Nettles*, *The woman on the boat*, and *Boy Under the Billboard*. Additionally, PMOs may suggest the enclosed space of body discovery. Examples include *Septic Tank Sam*, *The woman in the cardboard box*, *The woman in the suitcase*, and *The Lady in the Fridge*. Some of these, such as *The Boy in the Box* (applied to three different deceased) and *Woman in the Trunk*, emphasize especially confined spaces. Some units reference vehicles, as seen in *Coal Train Carlos*.

However, the circumstances influencing the creation of PMOs can vary significantly. Some names highlight the condition of the body, particularly when only remains are discovered. For example, *Setiabudi 13* refers to the discovery of 13 bones, while *The Bolney Torso* denotes a case in which only a torso was found. Similarly, *Trow Ghyll Skeleton* and *Skeleton in Sneakers* emphasize the advanced state of decomposition of the remains. There are also cases in which the PMO reflects the order in which body parts were discovered. For example, in the case of *Fred the Head*, the head was found first, whereas in *Theresa Torso*, it was the torso.

Some PMOs indicate the way the body was treated postmortem, e.g. *Lime Lady*, whose body was completely covered in lime to accelerate decomposition, *Tent Girl*, who was wrapped in tent fabric, and *Body in the carpet*, which refers to a body wrapped, among others, in a carpet. Here, we should also mention the case of a body staged to appear as a Persian princess, which is related to two PMOs, namely, *Persian Mummy* and *Persian Princess*. Another case that refers to the circumstances is *The Woman Who Wasn't Alone*, attributed to the body of a victim found in a hotel room. Her hands were bound, and there were visible signs of violence on her body.

Additionally, PMOs can also be inspired by the time of discovery. Examples include *Valentine Sally* and *Valentine Doe*, both named after Saint Valentine's Day – *Valentine Sally* was discovered on February 14, 1982, while *Valentine Doe* was found on February 15, 1991, a day after Valentine's Day. There is at least one example of a PMO that includes the year, namely *Jane Smyrna Doe 2019*.

4.5. Appearance

The collected examples of PMOs also refer to the body's physical appearance. For instance, one PMO is derived from the deceased's general appearance, suggesting a Latino origin. This is reflected in the name *Coal Train Carlos*,

where *Carlos* is a common name in Latin American countries, which aligns with the individual's presumed ethnic background. Similarly, based on the overall appearance, *The Bride* was given to the deceased due to her clean look.

In the material, we can also find *Scarlett Doe*, named for her distinctive red hair, and *The Woman with the Artificial Nails*, which highlights the deceased's appearance by emphasizing her notable nails. Both cases illustrate how unique physical features can be the source of the PMOs. Similarly, tattoos may play a crucial role in identification and thus inspire the name-givers, e.g. *the Girl with the Scorpion Tattoo*, *the Woman with the Flower Tattoo*, *the Woman with Panther and Scorpion tattoos*, *the Woman with Butterfly Tattoos*, *Cherries Doe*, *Bulldog John Doe*, *Daisy Doe*, and *Peaches*. While the first four units are self-explanatory, the others may require further clarification. First, *Cherries Doe* was named after a cherry tattoo. Second, *Bulldog John Doe* derived from a distinctive Marine Corps tattoo on his right arm, depicting a bulldog wearing a First World War helmet. Third, *Daisy Doe* was named as such because the individual had a daisy tattoo on their shoulder. Lastly, *Peaches* was given to an individual who had a tattoo of a heart-shaped peach with a bite taken out of it, accompanied by two falling drops.

Clothing items worn by the deceased can also inspire PMOs. Interestingly, these units do not necessarily refer to the clothing *per se*, but to the prints or logos. For example, *Betty Boop* was named after the cartoon character Betty Boop, who appeared on her T-shirt. Similarly, *Corona Girl* got her name from a T-shirt with a Corona beer logo, which became one of the few clues in her case. Lastly, *Vandy Jane Doe* was named after her hoodie with the Vanderbilt University logo. *Smurfette Jane Doe* was named after the distinctive blue-green shirt she wore, which featured the image of the cartoon character Smurfette and the text "HE SMURFS ME/HE SMURFS ME NOT." Another example of the unit that points to the text printed on the clothing item is *The woman with the 'Little Italy' T-shirt*.

There are also names that point to the textile designs, e.g. *Disco Dan*, attributed to a man found murdered in Texas in 1978. This byname is derived from the deceased's distinctive blue floral-print shirt, whose pattern resembled musical notation. Other cases based on textile designs include *The woman with the flower skirt* and *The woman with the paisley jeans*.

However, the color of clothing can also influence the creation of PMOs. For instance, *Lavender Doe* was named for her purple sweater; similarly, *Blue Pacheco*, was named for her blue clothing, and *Woman in Pink*, was named for her fuchsia pink pants, a blouse with a pink floral print, and black-and-pink sandals.

Interestingly, the type of clothing seems to be crucial to the PMO. *Pyjama Girl* was named after the pajamas she was found wearing, and *Buckskin Girl* after the buckskin jacket she wore. *Orange Socks* refers to a person who was found naked except for a pair of orange socks, which became the source of the PMO.

Another example is *Skeleton in Sneakers*, where the individual's sneakers were visible above ground at the time of discovery. A notable case is *Green Boots*, a name given to the body of an unidentified climber identified by his green boots, which have become a landmark along the main Northeast ridge route of Mount Everest. Various theories exist regarding the identity of the deceased. There is also an interesting case related to the gender of clothing items, namely, *The Woman in Men's Clothing*.

In addition to clothing, jewelry can also inspire the creation of PMOs. For example, *Girl with the Turquoise Jewelry* was named due to the several pieces of turquoise jewelry she had, while *Princess Blue* received her name from a ring with a blue gemstone. The *Woman with the 'Jean & Nelly' Ring* refers to a woman who wore a gold wedding band engraved with laurel leaves on the outside and the inscription on the inside.

Furthermore, clothing may sometimes allude to pop culture, movies, or literature. One example is *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, a name derived from the children's novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, in which the protagonist, Cedric Errol, is referred to as *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. This PMO was assigned to a boy from Waukesha, whose elegant clothing suggested he came from a wealthy family. Similarly, *Black Dahlia* was given to an individual who was last seen wearing a tight-fitting black dress – a reference to the 1946 film *The Blue Dahlia*, which was popular at the time and known for its noir themes.

4.6. Belongings

As previously discussed, clothing and jewelry can influence the postmortonyms assigned to deceased individuals, as they are essential personal belongings. However, other types of possessions, aside from clothing and jewelry, may also contribute to the creation of PMOs. For instance, two PMOs referring to the same individual – *Jason Doe* and *Grateful Doe* – are both derived from belongings found with the body. A note containing the name *Jason* led to the first byname, while two Grateful Dead concert tickets found with the deceased inspired the second. Similarly, *Tamam Shud Man*, a name derived from the Persian phrase “tamám shud”, meaning “It is over” or “It is finished.” The phrase was printed on a scrap of paper found in the fob pocket of the man's trousers. The note had been torn from the final page of a copy of *Rubaiyat*, a 12th-century poem by Omar Khayyám.

An interesting case is that of *The Globetrotter*, a woman found with several items suggesting international connections: a map of Vancouver, a map of Copenhagen Airport, a scientific American magazine with a subscription request for Payson (Arizona), a dermatology article with an address in Cambridge, magazine pages featuring the Danish Royal Family, and a Scandinavian Airlines luggage

label. Here, the *Christmas Tree Lady* can also be mentioned, since her body was discovered with a backpack and an 8-inch (200 mm) Christmas tree. Similarly, the PMO *Monique*, most likely derived from the empty handbag with the name *Monique* written on the outside, which was found near the body.

Other examples of PMOs derived from the objects include *the Girl with the 10-Pence Coin*, *the Woman with the Cane*, *the Woman with the Watch*, and *the Woman with the German Keys*, all of which may be considered self-explanatory. Some belongings, however, were not immediately visible at the time of discovery, e.g. *the Woman with the Richmond Dental Crown*.

4.7. Culture

Naturally, culture (e.g. popular culture, film, and literature) also influences postmortonyms. Several of the cases already mentioned under appearance fall into this category: *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (here linked to prose), *Tamam Shud Man* (here linked to poetry), *Betty Boop*, *Smurfette Jane Doe*, and *Black Dahlia* (here linked to movies). However, this list is not exhaustive.

One notable case of literary inspiration is *Lyle Stevik*, the name (here also a pseudonym) used by an unidentified man who checked into a motel in Amanda Park, Washington, on September 14, 2001. Two days later, he was found deceased in his room, having died by suicide through hanging. The name *Lyle Stevik* was taken from a character – Lyle Stevick (with slightly different spelling) – in Joyce Carol Oates' 1987 novel *You Must Remember This*, and it was self-assigned by the deceased. Another literature-related name is *Mostly Harmless* given to Vance Rodriguez, who died of starvation. He was also known by the false names *Denim* and *Ben Bilemy*, the latter of which he used while staying in various hostels. The name *Mostly Harmless* is likely a reference to a character from Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series.

Here we should also mention *Lady of the Lake*, which presumably refers to a character from Arthurian legend – a mysterious ally of Merlin who took part in various enigmatic missions. In some versions of the legend, only her arm is visible, always adorned in white, shimmering brocade. At other times, she is depicted walking on water or appearing in a castle, embodying a matriarchal deity.

Cinematic influences on PMOs are noticeable. While *Ms. Wiggins* was previously mentioned as an example containing the honorific *Ms.*, it also derives from a television series. *Mrs. Wiggins* was a recurring comedy sketch on *The Carol Burnett Show*, with one installment airing on Carol Burnett & Company. Another example, less straightforward, is *Julie Doe*, a PMO assigned to a transgender woman believed to have been murdered in Clermont, Florida, in 1988. The name *Julie* was chosen by forensic anthropology students examining her

remains. It was inspired by the LGBT-themed film *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*.

The last example, *Delta Dawn*, is the PMO given to the body of a female infant. This name possibly originated from a song written by Larry Collins and Alex Harvey, first recorded in 1971. However, the body was actually found near the delta of the Escatawpa River in 1982. Thus, the name *Delta Dawn* may derive from both the location where the body was found and the song.

4.8. Linguistic Effects

The final category of postmortonyms consists of various linguistic effects including two rhyme-based PMOs, *Fred the Head* and *Belle in the Well*.

Furthermore, we have wordplay based on the place of discovery, *Angel of the Meadow*, which refers to remains discovered in 2010 in Angel Meadow, a public park in Manchester.

Finally, PMOs feature alliteration, where at least two words in the PMO begin with the same sound, e.g. *Horseshoe Harriet*, *Theresa Torso*, *Tommy Torso*, *Palisades Pete*, *Pipeline Pete*, *Disco Dan*, *Christy Crystal Creek*, *Castleberry Kate*, *Skeleton in Sneaker*, *Ben Bilemy*, and *Nude in the Nettles*. Notably, these examples often incorporate common first names (e.g. *Pete* or *Christy*), presumably deliberately chosen to create alliteration, paired with nouns that serve to identify the location or condition of the remains upon discovery.

5. Structural analysis

The second analytical section is dedicated to the structural analysis of post-mortonyms and revisits some information presented in the previous one. However, it does so in a different context, emphasizing patterns of formation, i.e. focusing on the structure or syntax.

The most basic structural distinction within the collected PMOs is between monolexical and polylexical units. In the research data, the latter category clearly predominates, with monolexical units accounting for 15 examples. Some of them are commonly used first names or their diminutives, e.g. *Anna* or *Charlie*, while others are common nouns, such as *Peaches* or *Denim*. Moreover, there is also one adjective: *Funny*, or even two examples of single letters, as in the Japanese *N* and *W*. As previously noted (see Methodology), the multilingual character of the research data poses challenges for structural analyses. For instance, the Dutch *Heulmeisje* ('Heul Girl') and the Norwegian *Isdalskvinnen* ('The Isdal Woman') are classified as monolexical since they are closed-form compound nouns in their

respective language. However, when translated into English, they consist of two or three separate words.

Polylexical units in the research data range in length from two to eight words. The frequency distribution shows a clear inverse correlation between the length of PMOs (counted in words) and the number of occurrences in the research data. That is, as the number of words in a PMO increases, the number of such examples decreases. Thus, the most common are two-word PMOs (with over 70 examples), while there is only one example of an eight-word PMO. Two- and three-word PMOs constitute more than half of the research data, suggesting that brevity is clearly favored; yet the small number of monolexical examples might indicate that they are not informative, distinctive, or semantically transparent enough.

In two-word PMOs (73 instances), several structural patterns can be distinguished. Some follow the pattern [attributive noun] + [person-denoting noun], in which the second unit is a common noun referring to a human, while the first one modifies or specifies it, e.g. *Ballinamona Woman*, *Corona Girl*, *Lime Lady*, or *Somerton Man*. A similar pattern is [adjective] + [person-denoting noun], e.g. *Persian Princess*, *Różana dziewczyna* ('Rose Girl'), or *Lil Miss*, which uses an abbreviation of *little* and an honorific. In one example (*Princess Blue*), this order is reversed. Another pattern containing a person-denoting noun is [definite article] + [person-denoting noun], e.g. *the Bride* or *the Globetrotter*. Moreover, as noted in the section on anthroponyms, the PMOs also contain personal names, as in: [attributive noun] + [prosonym], which is used when a personal name constitutes the second unit, e.g. *Castleberry Kate* or *Baby Theresa*. Sometimes the prosonym is used as the first unit: *Theresa Torso* and *Tommy Torso*. Some examples are [first name] + [last name] combinations, e.g. *Peter Bergmann*, *Lyle Stevik*, or 吉田 慶子 ('Yoshida Keiko'). A special case is the use of *Doe*, when the PMO can be created to resemble a [first name] + [last name] sequence, e.g. *Millie Doe* or *Jason Doe*, or the first unit can be something related to the person – a noun, e.g. *Daisy Doe* – or an adjective, e.g. *Grateful Doe*. An interesting case is a PMO with an honorific as the first unit, followed by a proper noun: *Ms. Star-tex*, or by an abbreviation: *Mister S*. There are more cases in the research data, but they are scarcely represented. For instance, two examples follow the pattern [adjective] + [noun], where a noun phrase is headed by a common noun and modified by an adjective: *Green Boots* and *Orange Socks*. There is also one adjective phrase: *Mostly Harmless*. An example from Indonesia features a number: *Setiabudi 13*, and two examples from Japan – 女性X ('Woman X') and 少女A ('Girl A') – include single letters, which might suggest different postmortonym-formation patterns in some languages.

In three-word PMOs (47 instances), are created by adding a word (typically a noun) in front of *Jane Doe* or *John Doe*, e.g. *Vandy Jane Doe*, *Baby Jane Doe*, or *Ueno John Doe*. Another common pattern is the use of a first name or

a person-denoting noun preceded by two other words, typically nouns (common or proper), e.g. *Christmas Tree Lady*, *Coal train Carlos*, or *Wych Elm Bella*, and in one example, the first name is the first unit: *Christy Crystal Creek*. Some follow the pattern [definite article] + [proper noun] or [adjective] + [noun], often person-denoting nouns, e.g. *The Grauballe Man*, *The Nameless Girl*, or *The Bolney Torso*. Moreover, there are also some PMOs that include nouns followed by prepositional phrases, as in *Mężczyzna ze ścieżki* ('The Man from the Path'), *Stranger of Lipari*, or *Skeleton in Sneakers*. Three examples of PMOs for children include the adjective *little*, e.g. *Little Miss Nobody* and *Little Zion Doe*. Rare cases within the research data include, as already said, numbers, e.g. *Jane Doe 40*, as well as [first name] + [last name] combinations with abbreviated middle name: *Mary A. Anderson*, and appositive constructions: *Fred the Head*.

Within the four-word subcategory of PMOs (32 instances), two main formation patterns can be distinguished. The first one consists of a noun (mainly a person-denoting noun) followed by a prepositional phrase, e.g. *Boy Under the Billboard*, *Woman at the border*, *La Dama del Camello* ('The Lady of the Camel'), or *Jack in the box*. The second one is similar to three-word PMOs as it uses *Jane Doe* or *John Doe*, but they are preceded by two words (proper names, typically toponyms), e.g. *Miami County Jane Doe* or *Parker Dam John Doe*. One example, *Mill Creek Shed Man*, does not use *Doe*, but instead uses *Shed Man*, which provides more information. Other formation patterns, although scarcely represented, include two PMOs containing *Little Miss*, e.g. *Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee*, a combination of *Jane Doe*, place name, and year: *Jane Smyrna Doe 2019*, and an appositive structure: *Betty the Bag Lady*.

The remaining PMOs containing five or more words are discussed collectively, as they are rather homogenous structurally, regardless of their varying lengths.¹ Moreover, it should be noted that PMOs containing six or more words are almost exclusively sourced from Interpol. All but one (*Girl with the Turquoise Jewelry*) of these PMOs begin with a definite article, e.g. *la extraña dama de Garde* ('The Strange Lady of Gardey') or *The woman with the cane*. The article is followed by a noun, mainly a person-denoting noun, of which *woman* (or its equivalents) is the most common in the research data. In certain cases, the noun is preceded by an adjective, e.g. *pregnant* or *young*. All such examples include prepositional phrases, of which the most common is *in*, as the preposition of place indicating typically where the body was found, e.g. *The woman in the canal*, and *with*, indicating a characteristic (appearance or belongings), e.g. *The woman with the flower skirt* or *The woman with panther and scorpion tattoos*. Only three examples do not follow this pattern. Firstly, *The St. Louis Jane Doe*, which is a common pattern in the two and three-word PMOs,

¹ The distribution is as follows: five words: 30, six: 16, seven: 6, eight: 1.

The woman who wasn't alone, where the noun phrase also includes a restrictive relative clause, and *The young woman found in Saint-Denis*, with a reduced restrictive relative clause.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Since time immemorial, names have carried symbolic, metonymic significance, as though they embodied the bearer's character or appearance rather than merely being assigned on the basis of such traits. It can also be said that "[t]he meanings of names are the result of complex social negotiations, learned, and reified through socialization" (Leslie and Skipper 1990: 273). In the case of postmortonyms, the name-giver may be less concerned with what a name might offer the individual and more interested in what the name represents. In other words, PMOs typically reflect the deceased's physical condition. It also shows that the deceased are not merely bodies that need to be identified – if it were so, they could be just numbered – but are also people whose stories should be remembered or understood.

As the analysis shows, PMOs can usually be categorised fairly easily due to their relatively repetitive structure. The names examined were predominantly based on: (1) the possessions of the deceased, (2) the place of discovery, and (3) the appearance of the body. However, these categories are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive.

Regarding physical appearance, PMOs can, either directly or indirectly, indicate the deceased person's age. For children or infants, terms such as *boy*, *baby*, or diminutives are commonly used, while *John Doe* and *Jane Doe* generally refer to adults and also signal the gender of the deceased. Interestingly, the last name *Doe* on its own appears more frequently in male cases. In terms of age, the word *lady* is sometimes used to suggest an older woman (e.g. *Christmas Tree Lady*). However, in the analyzed research data, *lady* is also employed in other contexts – such as indicating a presumed female (e.g. *Lady of the House*, *Lady of the Hills*, *Lady of the Dunes*), referencing cultural motifs (e.g. *Lady of the Lake*), or simply as a polite form of address for an unidentified woman (e.g. *Lime Lady*, *Lady in the Fridge*). The anonymity of individuals is also highlighted in other PMOs, such as *Stranger of Lipari*, *Little Miss Nobody*, and *L'Inconnue de la Seine* ('The Unknown Woman of the Seine'). Some names also stem from unverifiable information. For instance, *the Frenchwoman* was so named because witnesses heard her speaking French – although this does not necessarily confirm her nationality. Similarly, *the Introvert* was named based on claims that the individual rarely spoke to others.

We also observe the use of generic names such as *John*, *Jane*, and *Jack*. However, it should be noted that the use of *John* and *Jane Doe* may also be

influenced by legal conventions in the respective country. Notably, in the collected material, there are 48 instances of *Doe*, primarily from the USA, with isolated cases from Spain, Japan, and Ireland.

While PMOs may originate from various sources or individuals, tracing their origins is difficult and certainly beyond the scope of this article. In some cases, their emergence in media outlets is apparent or suspected; in others, they originate from or are adopted by investigative organizations, e.g. Interpol or DNA Doe Project. Thus, although the media may play a role in creating or popularizing particularly striking PMOs, these bynames ultimately become established through their use beyond the originating source.

However, the analyses suggest that the form and content of PMOs may be source-dependent. For instance, PMOs sourced from Interpol tend to be longer and emphasize the deceased's belongings or clothing, with one exception: *The woman with the Belgian connection*, which appears more mysterious than informative. In contrast, shorter PMOs, often linked to highly publicized cases, may have been coined by journalists seeking a sensational, memorable name. Nevertheless, structural analysis shows that two- and three-word units are more common, possibly because monolexical units may lack informativeness, while longer ones may be less memorable. The topic of PMO length – and thus their descriptive character – deserves further analysis, since descriptiveness in onomastics is most prevalent in place names (see Bright 2003). Moreover, the presence of valorizing elements (either directly or indirectly) in the structure of PMOs provides a basis for studying the expressive function of these names, which – generally speaking – conveys the name-giver's emotional attitude toward the bearer (see Van Langendonck and Van de Velde 2016). This function is also present in names that include, for example, diminutives of personal names, further indicating their expressive character.

Nevertheless, regarding descriptiveness, it should be noted that the present analysis did not consider the capitalization of the PMOs. This aspect may be relevant when evaluating the nominative or descriptive character of the analyzed units. For instance, there may be a meaningful distinction between *Belle in the Well* and *The woman by the motorway*, with the former functioning as a naming unit and the latter likely serving as a mere description of the case.

Given the cultural and linguistic diversity of the analyzed material, the methodology presented can also be applied in cross-linguistic comparative studies of PMOs. Moreover, the above analysis not only demonstrates the need for a new category of *postmortonyms* within onomastic typology but also serves as a pilot study for future research. First, the results presented here are worth pairing with a questionnaire to assess the units' reception – whether they convey the intended information and are truly memorable. Second, the motivation behind the naming calls for further investigation, for example, whether specific names given to deceased infants are intended to evoke sympathy or possibly reflect the name-

giver's attitude toward the deceased (see *Precious Doe* case). Third, since PMOs used in widely recognized or international cases tend to be translated, a detailed analysis of how these names are transferred across languages would be valuable. Furthermore, it should be noted that the units were sourced from various websites with differing purposes (cf. Interpol vs. Unidentified-awareness.fandom), making a source-based analysis of PMOs another worthwhile direction for future research. In other words, the study could also focus on the name-givers, including not only institutions such as the police but also journalists and even the deceased themselves, who adopted names, i.e. pseudonyms, that later became PMOs. At the same time, it would be worthwhile to examine how these names function across various discursive spaces, such as institutional ones (e.g. judicial, legal, police) and media-related ones (e.g. press, internet, television), and in the texts that actualize them. The use of PMOs across such diverse areas of communication would also enable a deeper analysis of the functions they perform and their significance in social interactions. From a discursive perspective, proper names are treated as social constructs that offer insight into the collective consciousness of language users (Rutkowski and Skowronek 2019: 49) and, according to De Stefani (2016), they are worth further analysis in discursive environments.

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