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TOPONYMS IN THE ENGLISH TESTS: POLISH AND UKRAINIAN CASE

ТОПОНІМИ У ТЕСТАХ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ:
ПОЛЬСЬКИЙ ТА УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ПРИКЛАД

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This article presents the results of a study of the English language tests in the Republic of Poland (Matura) and Ukraine (External Independent Evaluation). The object of the research is the English examination texts. The subject of research is the toponyms in these texts. In this regard, the question arises what are the similarities and differences in the lexical content of tests in the Slavonic countries? The aim of the study is to analyze place names functioning in the English language tests. The purpose determines the choice of methods in our study. First of all, we used the general scientific methods of systematization, analysis and synthesis, besides, the quantitative analysis was used. Among the special linguistic methods we used structural and functional ones which served to determine the features of the examination text structure and the functions of toponyms. The source material for this study was tests taken from educational websites of these countries. Moreover, special attention has been focused on the toponyms typology in the researched tests. The article presents a brief description of the examination texts structure, as well as it highlights the certain structural features of proper names in examination texts. Summarizing the above mentioned, we can emphasize that an analysis of toponyms in the examination texts in English helps to better understand culture and tradition of the English-speaking countries. As a result of the investigation, the peculiarities of proper names functioning in the English linguistic worldview were studied. The findings of this paper can find application in the development of work programs, the creation of English language manuals and online textbooks, as well as in the creation of methodological recommendations for English tests preparing in different countries.

Key words: EIE (External Independent Evaluation), English test, Matura, proper names, intersubject connections.

У статті представлено результати дослідження тестів з англійської мови в Республіці Польща (Matura) та Україні (Зовнішнє незалежне оцінювання). Об'єктом дослідження є тексти іспитів з англійської мови. Предметом дослідження є топоніми в цих текстах. У зв'язку з цим постає питання: які подібності та відмінності існують у лексичному наповненні тестів у слов'янських країнах? Мета дослідження – проаналізувати топоніми, що використовуються в тестах з англійської мови. Мета визначає вибір методів у нашому дослідженні. Перш за все, ми використовували загальні наукові методи систематизації, аналізу та синтезу, крім того, було застосовано кількісний аналіз. Серед спеціальних лінгвістичних методів ми використовували структурні та функціональні, які слугували для визначення особливостей структури екзаменаційного тексту та функцій топонімів та розкриття їхніх лінгвокультурологічних аспектів. Джерелом для цього дослідження стали тести, взяті з освітніх веб-сайтів цих країн. Крім того, особлива увага приділялася типології топонімів у досліджуваних тестах. У статті подано короткий опис структури екзаменаційних текстів, а також висвітлено певні структурні особливості власних назв у цих текстах. Підсумовуючи вищезазначене, можна підкреслити, що аналіз топонімів в екзаменаційних текстах з англійської мови допомагає зрозуміти культуру та традиції англійськомовних країн. У результаті дослідження було виявлено особливості функціонування власних назв. Результати даної роботи можуть бути використані при розробці навчальних програм, створенні посібників з англійської мови та онлайн-підручників, а також при розробці методичних рекомендацій щодо підготовки до іспитів з англійської мови в різних країнах.

Ключові слова: ЗНО (Зовнішнє незалежне оцінювання), іспит з англійської мови, Матура, власні імена, міжпредметні зв'язки.

Problem statement. Ministries of education in every part of our planet evaluate their students and pupils' knowledge at the end of school. The universal spread and use of the English language throughout the world, as well as the globalization of the educational process, have influenced the inclusion of an English language test among the compulsory subjects that school graduates are required to take. According to the study by the Sociological Group "Rating", nearly a half (47%) of population of Ukraine supported the idea of introducing a mandatory "Foreign language" test [2, 2018, p. 4]. The Republic of Poland, and

Ukraine had already implemented English in their National Exam Set and scholars point out that in the modern Poland "English enjoys prestige among all ages because it is perceived as the language of professional and financial success and because it does not have the negative historical and political associations for Poles of German and Russian" [11, p. 218]. Researchers think that the main aims of the External Independent Testing, for example in Ukraine, were to combat corruption, increase equal opportunities, provide equal access to high quality tertiary education, and create a national assessment system

to monitor educational quality [7, p. 24]. External Independent Evaluation (EIE) in Ukraine is known as the National Multi-Subject Test (NMT) from 2022. EIE included mandatory tests in Ukrainian Language and Literature, Mathematics, and there is a choice between History of Ukraine or a foreign language (English, French, German and Spanish). Most Ukrainian applicants usually choose English at EIE. The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine reported that over 105,000 graduates took EIE in English, and over 2,000 in Spanish, German, and French [1].

There are similarities and differences in the English tests in Ukraine and Poland. The English part of the Ukrainian EIE is typically consisted of 1) Reading Section, 2) Use of English Section, 3) Writing Section and 4) Listening Section. There are multiple text passages with varied difficulty, multiple-choice questions testing comprehension and matching tasks (headings to paragraphs, statements to texts) in the Reading Section. The Use of English Section includes grammar and vocabulary exercises, multiple-choice questions, word formation tasks, gap-filling exercises. There are multiple audio recordings (dialogues, monologues, and announcements), multiple-choice questions, true/false statements, matching exercises in the Listening Section. Students have to write the task (typically a formal/informal letter, email, or short essay) in the Writing Section.

The Polish Matura exam for English is divided into: the Basic Level (Poziom Podstawowy), which includes Reading comprehension (3-4 texts with tasks like true/false, multiple choice), Listening comprehension (3-4 recordings with similar task types, etc.), Grammar and vocabulary exercises (gap-filling, sentence transformations), Writing (one task, typically an email, letter, or short message). Besides, there is the Extended Level (Poziom Rozszerzony) which is Optional one. This part of Matura includes more complex reading texts with advanced vocabulary, more challenging listening tasks, broader grammar and vocabulary assessment, longer essay (200-250 words) on more abstract topics and elements of knowledge about English-speaking countries. Oral Examinations conducted separately with an examiner and includes description of visual materials, role-playing scenarios, discussion on prepared topics. The Matura in Poland is the school-leaving exam, required for graduation from high school and for admission to higher education institutions.

Unresolved aspects of the problem. Despite the extensive research in general onomastics and the study of proper names in linguistics, the specific role

of toponyms in national standardized English tests within the Central and Eastern European context remains insufficiently explored. While there are studies focusing on the general structure of the Ukrainian EIE and the Polish Matura, a comparative analysis of how place names are used to balance local identity and global English standards has not yet been conducted. **The aim of the study** is to analyze place names functioning in the English language tests and to identify and compare the functional and quantitative distribution of toponyms in the English language examination materials of Ukraine and Poland.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Proper names are particularly significant units in the structure of any language test because they “may contain a number of connotations or associations” [8, p. 440]. Proper names included in the English test sometimes help students understand the idea of the tasks. The object of this research is English tests for high school graduates in the Republic of Poland, and Ukraine for 2017-2021 years; the subject of research are proper names used in the structure of these tests. A total of 1000 proper names were collected and analyzed (500 onyms are from Polish tests and 500 ones are from Ukraine test). At present, studies on structure and stylistic, grammar and vocabulary, national and cultural aspects of English tests have been carried out in many countries. English tests as the component of the national obligatory or selective tests have long been in the interest of many researchers in the world. Some scholars examine how the need to get students ready for English language exams impacts the teaching of writing to English in Poland [11], another authors research the comparative analysis of different exams in English like EIE (External Independent Evaluation), EVI, TOEFL, IELTS [3], the functional features of proper names in EIE and EVI [3, c. 234] [4]. However, no comparative analysis between tests taken from Ukrainian and Polish national English tests has been carried out.

The study of proper names in language tests reveals the potential of these lexical units, which sometimes act as unique symbols that unite the historical, linguistic and cultural background experience. Speaking about onomastics as an interdisciplinary study, J. Algeo and K. Algeo pointed out the disciplines connected with the study of names, among them anthropology, folklore, history, linguistics, etc. [5, p. 265-266]. Given that proper names are deeply embedded in culture, literature and history, they often carry a great deal of implicit information. This cultural and historical background makes proper names particularly valuable in the language tests contexts. That's why, the cultural and historical context

enclosed in proper names can be a key to understanding what's being asked in tests.

Presentation of the main material. Toponyms are among the most frequent proper names in the English tests of two countries. The significance of place names is determined by their ability to act as a bearer of cultural and historical heritage. According to ICOS, the toponym is the proper name of a place, both inhabited and uninhabited [9, p. 5]. Five groups of toponyms were found in the studied material: 1) choronym – proper name of a larger geographical or administrative unit of land [9, p. 2]; 2) settlement name – proper name of all kinds of human settlement [9, p. 5]; 3) hydronym – name of a body of water [9, p. 3], 4) hodonym – route name [9, p. 3]; 5) the nesonym – proper name of an island [9, p. 4]; 6) microtoponym – name referring to smaller objects like fields, pastures, fences, stones, marshes, bogs, ditches etc., and in general used locally by only a limited group of people [9, p. 4]. The central place among the toponyms in the Matura and EIE tests are occupied by the choronyms and settlement names, for example:

(1) *Roald Dahl's Adventures When Roald was sixteen, he decided to go off on his own to holiday in France. He [39] _____ the Channel from Dover to Calais with £24 in his pocket [a lot of money in 1933]. Roald wanted to see the Mediterranean Sea, so he took the train first to Paris, then to Marseilles where he [40] _____ a bus that went all the way along the coastal road towards Monte Carlo. He finished up at a place called St Jean Cap Ferrat and [41] _____ there for ten days. He travelled back home the same way but, by the time he reached Dover, he had [42] _____ no money left. Luckily a fellow passenger gave him ten shillings for his tram [43] _____ home. Roald never forgot this kindness and generosity (EIE, 2020).*

In reading comprehension tasks, personal names play a key role in shaping the reader's understanding of the text. Personal names help to identify main characters and build narrative coherence. The text from the EIE 2020 exam, titled "Roald Dahl's Adventures", demonstrates this power effectively through the repeated use of the name **Roald**. **Roald Dahl** is the name of the main character, a real-life British author. The title Roald Dahl's Adventures immediately gives the passage focus and clarity. Instead of reading about an unnamed young traveler, students know they are learning about a real person, which enhances both interest and credibility. Throughout the passage, the personal name **Roald** is repeated to maintain coherence and remind the reader who is experiencing the events. For instance, it is

Roald who crosses the Channel, Roald who travels to the Mediterranean, and Roald who is helped by a stranger on his way back home. The consistent use of his name ties the story together and keeps the narrative anchored. The use of *Roald Dahl's* name also provides historical context. Knowing that *Roald* is a real person who later became a famous writer makes his 1933 journey more meaningful. The detail that he had "£24 in his pocket (a lot of money in 1933)" becomes more vivid because readers can place it in a real-life timeline linked to a real individual. By using real names of toponyms, the text creates a sense of authenticity and historical accuracy, making it feel like a genuine adventure from Roald Dahl's life. There are choronym **France**, settlement names **Paris, Marseilles, Monte Carlo, Dover, Calais**, hydronyms **Mediterranean Sea** and **the Channel**. **The Channel** is short for the **English Channel**, the sea strait separating southern England from northern France. Although it's a common noun, in this context it's used as a proper noun referring to a specific, named body of water.

As it was mentioned above the choronyms and the settlement names are frequent enough among all toponyms, especially in contrasts to nesonyms and hodonyms in the The English tests. We may suggest that sometimes place names can invoke historical and cultural associations in students minds. A good example of this can be found in the Matura 2022 reading task about the reconstruction and sale of London Bridge.

The use of specific place names, such as **hodonyms** (e.g., London Bridge), **settlement names** (e.g., London), and **choronyms** (e.g., UK, USA), serves as a symbolic rhetorical device. When incorporated into a text or test, these proper nouns can capture the reader's attention and facilitate a more immediate understanding of the article's central theme, as illustrated below:

(2) *London Bridge was first built in 1209. It stood for centuries, but then started slowly sinking into the river. That is why, in the 19th century, the British Parliament chose a committee to examine the condition of the bridge. Bridge engineers had many ideas and finally the decision was made to build a new, stone bridge in place of the old one. The stone bridge was good enough for horse carriages, but in the 20th century, when cars and buses crossed it day and night, the bridge started sinking again. So in the 1960s, the Bridge Committee of London agreed to replace the bridge once more. When the decision was made, Archie Galloway, who was employed by the city council, had the idea of selling the old one. He advertised it for sale in the UK and USA. He*

was sure someone would be interested in buying it (Matura, 2022).

In this task from the English test, there is only one anthroponym Archie Galloway. This immediately signals to the reader that he is an important figure in the story. Personal names like Archie Galloway also help readers remember the sequence of events. Personal names and place names in such tasks work as mental landmarks, allowing students to recall what happened more easily.

In the next example, the English test task incorporates the anthroponym *Erden Eruc*, the nesonym **the Solomon Islands** alongside the choronyms **California, Australia** and the hydronym **the Pacific Ocean**:

(3) *Since Erden Eruc left California in a 7-meter-long boat, he has been rowing across the Pacific Ocean, heading for Australia with only birds, fish, and sharks for company. As if that isn't amazing enough, crossing the Pacific is only a part of his journey. Eruc has decided to go all the way around the world using only his own energy. Oh, and his plan includes climbing the tallest peak on six continents along the way. Eruc will row, bike, walk, and climb the world without the help from any motors at all. Why would he try to complete a difficult goal like this? He explains that he wants to inspire children to dream their dreams and reach their own goals. He wants to show kids that there might be tough parts along the way, and sometimes they might not even reach that final goal. But they can have great adventures and learn a lot along the way. Eruc has already faced some disappointments and challenges. For example, because he has to row about 10 hours a day, he brought along an MP3 player to listen to music, audiobooks, and study Spanish to pass the time. Unfortunately, the nearly daily tropical rain for several months has forced him to keep his player packed away where it's safe and dry. Not only that, but wind and waves keep pushing him westward when he wants to go south toward the Solomon Islands.* (EIE, 2020).

The proper names provide a clear and logical path for the *Erden Eruc*'s journey. The reader can mentally track the traveler's progress from California across the Pacific towards Australia, and then understand the specific navigational challenge of reaching the Solomon Islands. All proper names make the story more vivid, engaging, and informative.

Analyzing the toponyms in the following example, it is worth saying that among the settlement place **Cooper Pedy**, hydronym **lake Eyre**, there is the toponym **Dingo fence**.

(4) *Cooper Pedy is known as the Opal Capital as it is the biggest opal mine in the world. This tiny town has approximately 3,500 inhabitants – half of whom*

live underground. The desert cave hotel, ancient golf club, lake Eyre, and 3488 miles long Dingo fence are the places that are worth visiting. Visitors can see popular film sets like Moon Plain, Pitch Black, Mad Max, Red Planet, and Queen of Desserts. Tourists can also try digging the landscapes or hire expensive tunnel machinery. But before you think of mining your fortune in Cooper Pedy, know that it is hot – hellishly hot. Temperatures can rise to over 45° Celsius in the shade (EIE, 2020).

Cooper Pedy is the name of a town in South Australia, famous for its opal mines and underground homes, and students could know about this settlement from the Geography lessons at school or from the films like **Moon Plain, Pitch Black, Mad Max, Red Planet, and Queen of Desserts**. These movies are recognizable works that capitalize on Cooper Pedy's otherworldly landscape. By naming these films, the text taps into shared cultural knowledge. However, there are some place names in this task that learners might not be familiar with, for example, **Dingo fence**. At first look, it seems a microtoponym, but in fact it is a macrotoponym. The Dingo Fence, stretching thousands of kilometers across Australia, is a significant geographical feature, yet its name might still confuse those unfamiliar with its history or purpose. This highlights how cultural and geographical context play an important role in understanding place names in particular and all proper names in general. To mitigate the "cognitive trap" effect of unfamiliar toponyms learners should have specific lessons where they learn not only the English proper names but also the history and cultural context behind them. We support the statement that "when researchers and teachers assume proper names are UNKNOWN, they are in a position to [re]consider potential difficulties inherent in each proper name for that particular target L2 reader group [6, p. 154]. A more effective pedagogical approach necessitates first of all a dedicated study of geographical names; and secondly, the implementation of interdisciplinary, collaborative lessons. By connecting the study of place names to subjects like history, anthropology, and geography, we empower students to understand and use this vocabulary meaningfully, turning a simple list of words into a powerful tool for understanding and communication.

As a result of the accelerated integration of nations into a unified global system, most national examinations now feature a standardized set of toponyms representing nearly all regions of the world. This set is presented by almost all parts of the Earth. The results are presented in the **Table 1**.

Table 1

Toponyms deal with	Matura	%	EIE	%
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	45	29%	68	29 %
The USA	59	37 %	63	27 %
The European Union	31	19 %	52	23 %
Asian countries	13	8,7 %	14	6 %
African countries	3	1,8 %	13	5 %
American countries	3	1,8 %	8	3 %
Australia	4	2 %	12	4 %
Arctic and Antarctic	-	-	3	2%
Poland	1	0,7 %	-	-
Ukraine	-	-	-	-
Total	159	100%	233	100%

Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of the toponyms used in the English-language exam tasks of the Matura (Poland) and EIE (Ukraine). The data reveal both overlapping tendencies and distinct national priorities in the selection of culturally and geographically relevant content. Both tests show a strong focus on English-speaking countries, but with different emphases. The Polish Matura dedicates 66% of its toponyms to the UK and USA combined (29% UK, 37% USA), while the Ukrainian EIE allocates 56% (29% UK, 27% USA). This reflects the practical focus on major English-speaking nations where students might study or work. It must be added the results of the study of some researchers confirmed “the presence of not only the geographical, but also the cultural proximity of Ukraine and Poland” [10, p. 15] The Ukrainian EIE shows notably higher representation of European Union countries (23% vs 19% in Matura). This could reflect Ukraine's European integration aspirations and the importance of EU knowledge for Ukrainian students, especially given the country's EU candidacy status.

Both exams incorporate references to Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Australia, though their percentages remain relatively low. These regions collectively account for approximately 16% of toponyms in Matura and around 20% in EIE. Interestingly, the EIE includes more toponyms related to the Arctic and Antarctic (2%) and Australia (4%), pointing to a broader geographical scope in the Ukrainian exam.

While Matura includes a single reference to Poland (0.7%), EIE avoids direct references to Ukraine or local geography, which may reflect differing views on the appropriateness of including domestic content in a foreign language test. The absence of national references in the Ukrainian context suggests a deliberate strategy to maintain international focus and avoid regional bias.

Overall, the analysis of Table 2 highlights how the use of toponyms in both exams goes beyond linguistic input to reflect broader educational, cultural, and geopolitical orientations. The inclusion of diverse geographical references not only enriches students' intercultural competence but also prepares them for real-world communicative contexts where such knowledge is essential. The results of all kinds of proper names and toponyms found in the researched material are presented in the Table 2.

Table 2

	The total number of proper names	Toponyms	% toponyms
Matura [Poland]	500	159	32%
EIE [Ukraine]	500	233	47%

Conclusions. This study investigated the role of proper names in English language proficiency tests, specifically the Ukrainian EIE and Polish Matura exams, based on an analysis of 1000 proper names from tests administered between 2017 and 2021. The study of toponyms revealed that both tests heavily emphasize countries from the English-speaking world and the European Union, with a particular focus on the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Ukrainian EIE, however, showed a slightly broader global representation compared to the Polish Matura. All in all, five groups of toponyms were found in the studied material: 1) the choronyms; 2) settlement names; 3) the hydronyms, 4) the hodonyms; 5) the nesonyms. The central place among the toponyms in the tests are occupied by the choronyms and settlement names. A total of 159 toponyms were counted in the Polish Matura test, while 233 were counted in the

Ukrainian EIE test of 500 proper names. The most frequently mentioned toponyms in the Matura test are related to the USA (37%) and the UK (29%). In the EIE test, the most common toponyms are also the UK (29%) and the USA (27%). The toponyms of European Union are mentioned in 19% of the toponyms in the Matura test and 23% in the EIE test. Asian, African, and American countries appear less frequently in both tests. In the Matura test, Poland is mentioned in less than 1% of the toponyms, while Ukraine is not mentioned at all. The EIE test also includes mentions of the Arctic and

Antarctic, which are not present in the Matura test. The findings indicate that both tests heavily emphasize countries from the English-speaking world and the European Union, with a particular focus on the USA and the UK. The Ukrainian test demonstrates broader global representation. While both tests have limited coverage of non-Western regions, the EIE includes more diverse geographical references.

Prospects for further research in this area lie in a deeper psycholinguistic analysis of how students from different countries perceive unfamiliar English toponyms.

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