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THE INFLUENCE OF *THE KALEVALA* ON FINNISH COMMERCIAL NAMING

PAULA SJÖBLOM
University of Turku

Abstract

The national epic of Finland, *The Kalevala*, was published in 1835. It is based on Finnish oral poetry and old mythology. The epic has influenced in many ways in Finnish culture, arts, society and economy. The personal and place names of *The Kalevala* are in use in the contemporary nomenclature, as well. The Kalevala has had a special effect on commercial naming in Finland.

In this paper, some examples of Finnish company and product names which are inspired by *The Kalevala* are examined. All these names have a metaphoric or symbolic meaning: they do not tell anything about the referent directly, but their function is to arouse more complicated associations in people's minds. The material consists of company and product names from the late 19th and early 20th century as well as of contemporary commercial names.

Keywords: The Kalevala, mythical names, commercial names

Introduction

The Kalevala is regarded as the national epic of Finland. The material for it was collected and the book was compiled in the 19th century by Elias Lönnrot, a medical doctor, a poet, and a passionate Finnish-language developer. He gathered Finnish oral poetry during several field expeditions in Finland, Karelia and Kola Peninsula, and decided to make from the separate poems a story with a progressing plot. He published the first version of the book in 1835, and the new enlarged version of *The Kalevala* came out in 1849. It contains 50 poems, and it is the version that is commonly known today. (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 25-42.) It has been translated to over 60 languages (Wikipedia).

The Kalevala tells about folks of Kalevala and Pohjola, e.g. of their people's fights, revenges, offers of marriage, and of the building and robbery of the miraculous device, Sampo, which brings wealth and fortune to its owner. The epic begins with a traditional creation myth about world egg, and ends to a song which tells about the arrival of virgin Marjatta's son meaning the end of old reign over Kalevala. The similarity to myths and traditions of other cultures, including Christianity, is obvious.

There are many interesting characters in the epic, Väinämöinen being the most important of them. He is a shamanistic hero whose singing has a magical power. Unlike in most of the other epics in the world, the conflicts and quarrels are usually solved by the power of words and music and not by force and violence.

The Kalevala has influenced in many ways not only on the culture and arts of Finland but also on many other cultures in the world – for instance, J. R. R. Tolkien has claimed that this book was one of his sources of inspiration (Petty 2004). *The Kalevala*'s composition took place in Finland at the time of the national awakening. An own national epic had an enormous effect on Finnish people; it meant that Finland, which originally was only an Eastern region of Sweden and since 1809 had been a part of Russian empire, had entered by itself among the civilized nations of Europe. The stories, characters, and the language of *The Kalevala* affected not only to Finnish visual arts, music, and literature, but also to the economy – not least to commercial naming. (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 275, 313-316, 319.)

Study of commercial names

Commercial names can be defined as names "whose function is to steer the choices of consumers and investors and whose use has economic objectives". They have a juridical owner and they can be a subject of trade themselves. Commercial names usually refer either to businesses or to products. (Sjöblom 2016: 453.)

A rapid development of commercial nomenclature started in Europe in the 18th century, and it was bound to the development of free commerce and advertising. The merchants and manufacturers had to compete for buyers. Advertising gave visibility, and names gave the businesses and products individuality which distinguished them from other businesses and products of the same kind. At first, company names were informative, consisting e.g. of the personal names of the entrepreneurs or of appellatives describing the field of business. Later, company names that did not describe the business directly but in an associative way became more and more popular. Product names had a similar development: first, products were named after the company, whereas nowadays products are often named with specific expressions. (Sjöblom 2016: 455-456.)

Due to the many functions of commercial names, semantics plays a central role in their creation and use, as opposed to toponyms, for example. In my dissertation (Sjöblom 2006) about Finnish company names I developed a research method based on cognitive linguistic theory for the study of the semantics of names. It is based on analyzing so called semantic schemes, which are relationships between the morpho-phonological structure of the name and the cognitive domains evoked by the referent of the name. The scheme can be a direct relationship or an indirect relationship, which again can be a metaphoric, a symbolic or a metonymic relationship. There are also many commercial names that do not consist of recognizable words or names and whose semantic scheme therefore can't be direct or indirect as such. These names have either a compressed scheme (*Novosat* < Lat. *novus* 'new' + *satellite*) or a disconnected scheme (*IBM*). (Sjöblom 2006; 2008: 77-79; 2016: 461.)

In this article, I will examine some Finnish company and product names which are inspired by *The Kalevala*. All these names have a metaphoric or symbolic meaning scheme: they do not tell anything about the referent directly, but their function is to arouse more complicated associations in people's minds. I will contemplate their semantics and try to explain the metaphors they are based on.

The material consists of company and product names from the late 19th and early 20th century as well as of contemporary commercial names. The material is not a comprehensive collection of names, and the study does not aim at an overall picture about Finnish commercial names influenced by the national epic. Instead, I will analyze a few interesting examples in order to give a conception of the principles and reasons of this kind of naming.

Names influenced by *The Kalevala* in the era of national awakening

The category of company names gradually developed in Finland during the 19th century. The process came to the final point in 1864 when the Finnish decree of limited companies officially sealed the concept of company name. Also the category of product names derives from the 19th century, however these names appeared for instance in advertisements some decades later than the company names. (Sjöblom 2012: 426, 428.)

The first companies in Finland whose names referred indirectly to the company, acted in the insurance industry. Strikingly many of them had a name influenced by *The Kalevala*. The oldest insurance company in Finland was named *Kaleva*, and it was grounded in 1874. The name – which is included also in the title of the epic – is a mythical old Proto-Finnic personal name meaning e.g. 'strong, excellent, giant' (SSA). So, the name is based on a metaphor THE COMPANY IS A MYTHICAL PERSON.¹ A similar metaphor is used also in the name *Kullervo* which was an accident-insurance company grounded in 1895. Kullervo is a tragic character of *The Kalevala*. His life is full of bad luck and mistreat. The metaphor thus highlights support towards people who have met with accidents and the hardness of life.

Fire-insurance company Pohjola was grounded in 1891. *Pohjola* is a place name in *The Kalevala*. The word *pohjola* is also an appellative of Finnish meaning 'northern districts, northern lands'. However, it is

¹ Small caps are used for allocating metaphoric and metonymic schemes in the same manner as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) use them in the description of the systematic metaphoric nature of language. For instance, the metaphoric concept TIME IS MONEY is realized in expressions such as *waist one's time*, *save time*, *run out of time*, *live on borrowed time* etc. The reason for using metaphors in language is to explain abstract phenomena via concepts that are easier to understand. By the choice of metaphor the speaker can on one hand highlight, on the other hand hide certain features of the concept. One very common metaphor is personification which sees something non-human as human.

obvious that the company name *Pohjola* originates from the epic. It was created in the era of national awakening and at the same period with many other company names influenced by *The Kalevala*.

The book was important for Finnish nation, it was popular and positively accepted, and it was the symbol of the spirit of the times. The above mentioned insurance companies saw the potential of using in their marketing this work based on the talent of Finnish folks. Similarly acted also the insurance companies called *Pohja* and *Sampo*, which both were established in 1909. *Pohja* is a parallel name for *Pohjola*, and *Sampo* was in *The Kalevala* the name of the magical device of fortune. The metaphor behind this name is THE COMPANY IS A LUCKY OBJECT, and as such, it highlights the company's property of bringing wealth and prosperity to the customer.

In fact, naming an insurance company with a name or word from *The Kalevala* became a model which has been used in our times, as well. For example, *Tapiola* is the name of an insurance company established in 1982. There is also a local insurance company called *Vellamo* in Tavastia, Finland. In *The Kalevala*, the king of forest is called *Tapio*, and *Tapiola* is the name of his kingdom. The metaphor would be the same as for the names *Pohjola* and *Pohja*: THE COMPANY IS AN INHABITED PLACE. As for *Vellamo*, she is the goddess of water in *The Kalevala*.

Besides insurance companies, there were also many other kind of businesses and products with a name from *The Kalevala*. For example, in 1899 a newspaper called *Kaleva* started to be published, and it is still issued in Finland. Especially big vehicles, such as locomotives, boats and icebrakers, got – and still get – names from *The Kalevala*, symbolizing strength and Finnishness, e.g. steam ships *Ilmarinen* and *Sampo* in the 1890's (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 290-291). Also a Finnish tractor model manufactured in the beginning of 20th century was called *Kullervo* (Ainiala et al. 2012: 233).

***The Kalevala* and contemporary commercial names**

Because the publication of *The Kalevala* had a huge meaning to the whole nation in the 19th century, it is understandable, that its influence can be seen in the commercial naming of that era. Names like *Kaleva*, *Kullervo* and *Sampo* were something that had not been seen in economic connections before; therefore they were something very new and very modern at the same time that they conveyed ideas of the great past of Finns. By contrast, it might be striking that commercial names influenced by *The Kalevala* are even more common in our times. This epic is something that has affected the Finnish culture for over 150 years – what is it that still makes it useful and enticing in marketing purposes?

There are well-known and big companies in Finland which have a name inspired by *The Kalevala*, and there are plenty of businesses with such a name and known mainly on a local level, as well. There are company and product names from *The Kalevala* in all possible branches of business, in food industry as well as in constructing (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 295). The epic has also influenced in names of institutions and societies, and there are traces of it in several product names. Even some folk music band names have had at least some inspiration from the Finnish folk poetry and *The Kalevala*.

The title of the epic itself is borrowed in the name of *Kalevala Koru*, in English *Kalevala Jewelry*, a famous Finnish company and brand, and one of the largest jewelry manufacturers in northern Europe. The company was founded already in 1937, and in the beginning it manufactured and sold copies of iron era jewelry. Afterwards, it started to design and make also modern jewelry. (Kalevalajewelry.com.) Because of the original and still existing business idea, the brand name can be considered metonymical: the product designs are from the era of the story of *The Kalevala* and therefore the name is metonymically connected to the products.

Some other big Finnish companies with a name influenced by *The Kalevala* are for instance the pension insurance company *Ilmarinen*, the infrastructure and building construction company *Lemminkäinen*, the healthcare company *Mehiläinen* and the furniture merchandiser *Sotka*. The names *Ilmarinen* and *Lemminkäinen* carry the metaphor THE COMPANY IS A MYTHICAL PERSON. In *The Kalevala*, *Ilmarinen* is a blacksmith, and the miraculous device *Sampo* is forged by him. His name contains the Finnish word *ilma* 'air', and originally he probably has been the god of wind and thunder in the Finno-Ugric mythology. He has for example forged the sky. (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 99-100.)

Lemminkäinen is the name of a handsome young ladies' man who loves adventures and combats. He faces a tragic death by getting killed and drowned in the river *Tuonela* ('the underworld'). His mother gathers his broken body from the river and ties all pieces together with a bee's honey. This theme has been connected e.g to the myth of *Osiris* (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 106).

The healthcare company name *Mehiläinen*, in English ‘bee’, is thus originated in *The Kalevala*, as well. Lemminkäinen’s mother used the nectar of a bee in repairing her son, therefore the name symbolizes the all-embracing cures that the company can offer for patients. The metaphor THE COMPANY IS A MIRACULOUS ANIMAL can be seen also behind the furniture merchandiser’s name *Sotka*, ‘pochard’. According to *The Kalevala*, the world was created from an egg of a pochard, a diving duck.

There are plenty of smaller companies whose name comes from *The Kalevala*. The above-mentioned *Sampo* has been extremely popular in business naming, symbolizing richness, abundance and productivity (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 297). Very many names are based on the metaphor THE COMPANY IS A MYTHICAL PERSON. The central hero of the epic, Väinämöinen, is to be seen e.g. in the names *Hoivakoti Väinämöinen* (hospice in Valkeakoski, Finland) and *Bar Väinämöinen* (a Finnish bar in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife). A car parking hall in Turku is called *P-Louhi*, and a restaurant in Helsinki is called *Taverna Pohjan Akka*. Both names refer to one of *Kalevala*’s main characters, the angry and powerful mistress of Pohjola who is called *Louhi*. The etymology of *Louhi* is uncertain (SSA), but the phonological structure reminds of the verb *louhia* ‘to excavate, dig’, and this way it is a suitable name for a parking hall which has been excavated into the rock. *Pohjan Akka* ‘the old woman of Pohja’ is a parallel name for *Louhi*.

Aino is a young and beautiful girl that her brother Joukahainen promises to give as the wife of the old Väinämöinen. She does not agree, and rather than submit to this terrible fate of marrying the old man, she drowns herself. There are many companies as well as products which have used this unfortunate beautiful girl’s name for economic purposes, such as restaurant *Aino* in Helsinki and an ice cream brand *Aino*. The meaning of the word *ainoa* is ‘the only one’. Her brother’s name appears for instance in a hunting and fishing society’s name *Joukahainen*.

There are also product names such as *Kullervo-puukko* (*puukko* ‘knife’), *Väinämöisen palttoonnapit* (‘Väinämöinen’s coat buttons’) which is a rye-bread name, and *Ahti-silli* (*silli* ‘potted herring’). *Ahti* is the other name of the heroic character Lemminkäinen in *The Kalevala*, but originally in the Finnish mythology, *Ahti* or *Ahto* is the god of sea (Anttonen and Kuusi 1999: 97).

Conclusion

The Finnish national epic *Kalevala* and its many names have widely and continuously inspired the Finnish markets and business players. In the 19th and early 20th century, names from *The Kalevala* symbolized national spirit and pride on Finnish culture, and they represented a modern means of commercial naming and gaining new customers. The book has been an unfailing source for new commercial names since those times, but the reason for the popularity of *The Kalevala* in commercial naming is no longer the same as before. Instead, naming companies and products after *The Kalevala* has become a naming model, the main function of which probably is to emphasize the positive values of the Finnish origin of the business.

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