Transanthroponimisation As a Productive Way of Self-nomination on the Internet

Viktoria V. Kaziaba¹, * and Elena Yu. Vereshchagina²

¹Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov
ul. Karla Marksa, 36, 164500, Severodvinsk, Russia
ORCID: 0000-0002-1777-1712

²Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov
ul. Karla Marksa, 36, 164500, Severodvinsk, Russia
ORCID: 0000-0003-2249-4614

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Abstract. The article is devoted to one of the popular methods of self-nomination in the Internet-space—transanthroponimisation. Creating a virtual persona each user needs own name, the so-called nickname. A study of 10000 nicknames and related accounts of German-speaking users of various Internet-services (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, World of Tanks, World of Warcraft, etc.) reveals that almost one fifth of users name themselves in virtual space using “strange” or precedent anthroponyms. This transfer of proper names from one denotatum to another one—transanthroponimisation—is today in demand and has a number of linguistic and extralinguistic features described in the present article. To implement this type of nominal transposition, both multiple and single (precedent) anthroponyms are used: names, surnames, pseudonyms of musicians, athletes, politicians, heroes and characters of books, films, etc. The main motive for transanthroponimisation between the two denotata is their similarity or proximity. Self-nominations created in this way have significant illocutionary content, diverse connotations, and give direct or indirect characterization to their owners.

I. Introduction

In the context of the cybernetization of modern life and communications, when almost every civilized person has at least one, and often a repertoire of virtual personalities, anthropocentric Internet-researches assume a greater importance. Summarizing the diverse view of the essence of a virtual personality, it can be unambiguously concluded that two core components are minimally necessary for Internet-persona: independent actions and the name itself—nickname.

The nickname (nick) has long and solidly taken its place in the onomastic system of any language. German in this sense is no exception. As a special type of anthroponym for Internet-communication, the nickname implements such important functions as: identification, self-identification, self-presentation and, finally, self-nomination of the Internet-user. The last function acts as a fundamental, basic attribute and a unique feature of the nickname.

Self-identification through nickname in Internet-communication is carried out in various ways: using one's own real anthroponym (Lena7, “Kloppmann”, NiNo LaPinSki), appellatives (Blaue Käse, + DEATHGIRL +, foxy) and their combinations (Fahrer Olaf, traumIna, cool Lola) as an Internet-name [1]. A very special group consists of nicknames for which creating the “strange” or precedent proper names are used. This segment of name modeling is in the focus of this paper.

II. Method and Data for Study

The layer of self-nominations of this kind in the German-speaking Internet space is quite extensive. The study involved 10000 nicknames and the accompanying metadata of German-speaking users of Internet-services of various genres: social networks (Twitter, Facebook), photo and video hosting services with elements of social networks (Instagram, YouTube, Skype, Flickr),
online games (World of Tanks, World of Warcraft), chats (Motortalk, Kochrezepte). The selection of precisely German-speaking users was carried out taking into account geolocation tags or using the standard program functions “Search for new contacts”, where the requirements “Germany” and “German” were set in the filter fields “Country” and “Language”, respectively. Other filters, such as “Gender”, “Age”, “Profession” and others, were left blank. Further, the nicknames and personal data of the user were extracted from the proposed set of satisfying accounts by the method of simple random sampling. The use of this probabilistic sampling method is due to the large volume of potential factual material and, as a consequence, the impossibility of using other methodological techniques. The data for this study were also collected through online surveys and direct contact with informants. As part of research internships in 2017-2019, the author of the paper conducted a survey and questioning of the German-speaking population in the city of Hanover.

The data collected in this way were initially analyzed from the point of view of the nominative potential of its constituent units. A group of nicknames formed by transanthroponimisation was selected and further characterized by linguistic and extralinguistic features.

III. Results

The analysis revealed that about one fifth of virtual self-nominations are nicknames created on the basis of various borrowed anthroponyms: Heath Ledger (Mathias Keppe), Mutter Theresa (Astrid Brückner), Tony Montana (Mischa Merz), Dolores (Ingrid Grossmann).

The impressive volume of the described nominal layer is determined by the multifaceted motives of this self-nomination, such as: anonymization, “masking” of the personality, the need to demonstrate originality and (or) creativity, the desire to be different from other users, humor and (self)irony. Often with the help of such nicknames, a person emphasizes any one or several sides of his person. For example, a young rock musician and fan of the group “Tokio Hotel”, Mathias Bickes, communicates under the nickname Bill Kaulitz, which, in essence, represents the name and surname of the lead singer of the mentioned music group. The user explains the choice of this nick so: “Ich mag Tokio Hotel und ich selbst spiele Rock. Meine Freundin meint, ich und Bill, wir beide sind im Prinzip ähnlich. Echt” (written according to the informant). A number of motives of self-nomination are associated with certain grounds emotionally significant for the name holder. The girl Emilia N. has the nickname Roxanne, which means, in her own words, the girl, who is sung about in the eponymous song by the rock group “The Police”. When asked about the reasons for choosing a virtual name, the respondent answered in the questionnaire the following: “lange Zeit war es mein Lieblingslied quasi earworm. So nannten meine Freunde mich Roxanne oder sogar Roxy manchmal” (the punctuation of the original has been retained).

Borrowing of “strange” proper names is carried out either by directly transferring the naming of one denotate to another, or by comparison or on the basis of some kind of proximity, conjugation of concepts. The real objects, mythological images, heroes of works of art, and so on, can play the role of the original objects of nominal movement (the so-called lexical transposition).

The basis for such a transfer of names is, as a rule, their associative conditionality. The original character (person), whose name is used in the secondary nomination, certainly turns out to be similar to the one that takes this name. The principle of similarity is the main condition for a nominal transaction [2].

Within the framework of the factual material being studied, it seems possible to describe several ways of nickname formation on the basis of “strange” anthroponyms.

IV. Discussion

4.1. Transanthroponimisation of the type “multiple anthroponym → nickname”

The first way under consideration is characterized by the replacement of a real anthroponym with any other, multiple anthroponym inherent in the traditional human name system. The user changes own name to one that, in his opinion, is more harmonious, prestigious and suitable. Most often, we
are talking about purely personal preferences and desires in this way to adjust your virtual persona in the right direction. In all studied cases of anthroponymic substitution, personal names are exposed. Examples of such self-nominations are: Lewis (Manuel Groche), MARKO (Kim Wulf), * ~ Bella ~ * (Inge Kantereit), Kerry (Marlena Fr.), * i * m (hening köhler), LolaLein777 (Vicky Vicky). Sometimes there is a splitting of the real and virtual personality of the user, which necessitates different names for live and computer-mediated communication. For example, Olaf Freiherr is hiding under the nickname Siegfried, explaining this fact so: “Olaf find ich doof, wie Olaf Schneemann aus Eiskönigin von Disney. Online-gaming braucht Helden und SIEGE! Hier bin ich kein Oli aus 7.klasse mehr” (the punctuation of the original has been retained).

The multiple “strange” anthroponyms that play the role of a nickname in Internet-services sometimes belong to real persons. As a rule, they are relatives and friends of the author of self-nominations. So, the use by a man of a clearly feminine anthroponym for self-presentation on the Internet initially confuses the recipient. In the process of communication, it becomes clear that the nickname is nothing other than the name of the ladylove of the user: TanJA (Leonard Schuppe), Madina ♥♥♥ (Jan Feldmeyer). Women also use the anthroponyms of husbands, boyfriends for self-nomination: Charly (Marina Rothe), --- KrIs --- (Romina Kremer), but even more often, they use the personal names of their children: Doris (Sabine K.), k_i_r_a (Nadin Lehnbach).

4.2. Transanthroponimisation of the type “single anthroponym → nickname”

The use of names belonging to specific denotata is reflected in the second method of transanthroponimized nickname creation. However, in this case we are not dealing with multiple, but with single anthroponyms. In traditional nickname-making, an indispensable condition for the transition of an anthroponym from one individual to another one is the fame of the name “giver”, precedence of his name [2]. As precedent names in a general sense, should be understood “well-known proper names that are used in the text not so much to denote a specific person (situation, city, organization, etc.), but as a kind of cultural sign, a symbol of certain qualities, events, destinies” [3]. Thus, for us precedent names mean not just well known borrowed, individual, single anthroponyms, but different classes of proper names that have emotional and cognitive significance within a certain linguistic culture [4].

Germanist Yu. A. Blinova identified two areas of precedent onomastic space: precedent proper names with real and irreal (imaginary) denotations. In a precedent onomasticon with real denotata, the researcher identified three classes of precedent proper names: anthroponyms, chrematonyms (names of products of a person’s material and spiritual activity) and chrononyms (names of events, phenomena). Classes of proper names such as mythonyms, names of fairy-tale characters, biblical onyms, anthroponyms from the world of literature and cinema were classified as precedents for proper names with denotata from the surreal space [4].

As discussed above, in the studied group of nicknames based on transanthroponimisation, an extensive part of self-nominations is made from precedent (single) anthroponyms. In order to create a virtual persona, the German-speaking users eagerly take personal names, surnames, nicknames, pseudonyms belonging to real denotata. Let us consider in detail the most popular areas of real anthroponymic borrowing.

4.2.1. Transanthroponimisation of the subtype “single real anthroponym → nickname”

Different anthroponyms of persons known in any professional fields are actively playing the role of Internet-nicks. A favorite technique for users is to nominate themselves with the name of a favorite music artist: Selena Gomez (Jana Jana), Shakira (Laura Erlen), Kanye Omari West (Edward Voigt), EMINEM (Thomas Wrt.). Sometimes there is a sexual dissonance between the user and the nickname: Justin Bieber (Lisa Brunner), Billie Eilish (Oskar Hemne). Events in the music world are instantly reflected in Internet-names. As an example serves the fact that in the summer 2017 there was an abundance of nicknames dedicated to the deceased American singer, leader of the rock band Linkin Park, Chester Bennington. According to the assurances of many users, such self-nominations were a tribute to their idol: Chester Charles Bennington (Peter Krause), Ches Bennington (Caro Shuchow), shesterbennington (Linda Horn), !Forever Bennington! (Joseph Zieglermeyer).
Along with the names of musicians, the German-speaking Internet communicants prefer the names of sporters, especially football players. The base of these self-nominations is also the transfer of the anthroponym from an idol to a fan: ronaldo (Daniel Mauelshagen), Manuel Neuer (karl kerl), 111MiroKlose111 (Jens Tischler), _Messi_ (Otto Perelmann).

The corpus of data has many cases borrowing of names from the political sphere: Angela Merkel (Hans Maulwurf), Gandhi2000 (Jan *), Mr. Putin (Georg Tulpe), O! Bama (Krisian Sachs), InTrumpWeTrust (martin krt). The motives for such transpositions are heterogeneous. For example, under the nickname Che Guevara hides the fifteen-year-old boy David Gehrmann, who is convinced that the name of the commandant reflects the rebellious spirit of his age in the best possible way. The user Klaus Moeller, being an adherent of certain political views, chose the last name of Donald Trump for the Twitter-nickname. The other communicator Sepp Weiner with a similar nick explains its origin with the similarity of his hairstyle and the styling of the US president.

The next curious of the virtual self-nomination is usage of the lexemes, which themselves are already nicknames, pseudonyms. Women fell in love with the stage name of singer Stephanie Germanotta, better known as Lady Gaga: lady gaga (gaga feat laura lady ^^), Lady Gaga (Manuela Plonka), Lady Gaga (Isabelle Herlinghaus). One user in an attempt to “try on” the image of her beloved singer virtually uses not only her pseudonym, but also indicates the performer’s data in the “real name, surname” column of account, and not her own: lady Gaga (Joanne angelina stefani germottha). User Florian Roth appears under the nickname The Rock, which is the nickname of film actor and wrestler Dwayne Douglas Johnson. The virtual informant claims that he, firstly, like a star, is engaged in martial arts, and secondly, he is very similar to those personages that the actor creates in his films.

4.2.2. Transanthroponimisation of the subtype “single irreal anthroponym → nickname”

The method of transanthroponimisation is widely applicable in self-nomination models based on proper names of not only real, but also unreal denotata, which include the names of characters and heroes in movies, cartoons, literary works, computer games, and so on.

The names of the characters of computer games are quite popular today: Kitana (Natascha Buller), Jonny Banana (Daniel Gerhardt), Max Warrior (Cyle Taub), - = cYrAx = - (Norman S.). Such self-nominations show only what game the user is palying, and on whose side his sympathies are. Although some users admit: their choice is caused by some similarities between the character of the game and the gamer. For example, user Max refers to himself as Sephiroth, the anthroponym for the main antagonist of the video game Final Fantasy VII. The author of the nickname sees a number of similarities with the game character: external beauty, inconsistent character, love for mother and emphasized indifference to women.

Often, such nicknames are only a reflection of the popular trends in the gaming industry. Therefore, the production of the continuation of the legendary shooter “Duke Nukem” in June 2011, which gamers have been waiting for 14 years, provoked the appearance of the identical nicknames. They are based on the name of the main game hero: Duke Nukem (Marco Launek), Duke Nukem (Tommy). The anthroponymic body of virtual communication is very sensitive to any popular trends and significant events in a certain area of human life.

There is another peculiar way of self-nomination through irreal transanthroponimisation. Some persons use their own virtual anthroponyms as nicknames in different Internet-services, which function in a computer role-playing game. Such cult games as “Gothic” and “World of Warcraft” involve creating of a unique game character with all personal attributes, including a name. Its appearance in other Internet-services is the result of double self-nomination. First, the nickname is selected or created for the game process, and then a user makes the secondary choice of the same nick as a name sign and transfers it, for example, to the sphere of social networks, chat communications. The study found 406 users trying to maintain the integrity of their virtual identity in this way: Nachtelf-Druidin Sha (ella trommelsteiner), Zwörgy (Stefanie), - = Mordrag = - (Daniel Heide). Case in point is the nickname of the user Jim in the game “World of Warcraft”, where the character of the teenager plays the role of a warrior named Xitrus. The user has
subsequently transferred the game nickname that appeared back in 2004 to his Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The abundance of units related to the field of computer games is quite predictable. Such nicks indicate the user's involvement in the digital culture and the virtual community. In addition, the movement of units within different genres of the same communication field is a simple and relatively natural process.

Animation becomes a popular sphere providing Internet-communications with names too. The result is explained by the domination of teenager accounts. An obvious trend is the addiction of the German-speaking users to the characters of Japanese animation – anime: Chibiusa ♥ (Annika), Wanyūdō (Manny b.), Kimba (Gudrun Balgalwis), O-Jou (Saskia), Kikuri (きくり) (Alisia Krueppe) Saeba (Nils Köhler). The psychologism and drama of the plot, the leitmotif of antagonism and the abundance of characters in Japanese cartoons bring them closer to computer games, where each character has absolutely unique properties and abilities. Users borrow the names of the heroes or characters they sympathize with and compare they with themselves. The precedence of such anthroponyms is reduced and actualized only in the youth environment, where this type of animated creativity is accepted.

The situation is completely different with characters extracted from iconic, world-famous cartoons. The vast majority of users create their self-nominations from the names of the characters of the popular animated series like “The Simpsons”, “American Dad!”, “South Park”, “Family Guy”, “Rick and Morty”. This choice is always perceived as humor and self-irony in view of the grotesque images of the main characters. Curious is the fact of some age and social correlation between the nickname holder and the animated hero or character. For example, adult married men nominate themselves with the names of serial family members: Peter Griffin (Sebastian Siglmüller), Peter griffin (gatner marc), Homer Simpson (Homer), Stan Smith (Moris Mölcker). Some schoolchildren hide their real persona under the names of fairly well known pupils from South Park: Eric Cartman (Janik Schramm), Kenny Mc (Allan Duh), where Eric Cartman is a symbol of arrogance, enterprise and cynicism, and Kenny McCormick is an embodiment of reticence.

The film industry and literature also provide Internet-communication with specific self-nominations. Girls tend to be called fairy-tale charaters, giving their virtual persona romance, naivety and playfulness: Rotkäppchen. * (Mareike.), Schneewittchen (Sonja Kohl), Scarlett O’Hara (Lisa Detler), dorothygale (Marie Lange). Men also romanticize their web-personality with literary anthroponyms like Romeo (mario schnur), Don Quijotte (David Farys). However, for self-nomination, they often choose the names of outstanding movie heroes and characters: Skywalker (Timo), Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Maxi), Bruce Wayne (Michael Annen), ~ Austin Powers ~ (Kevin Ltd.), James Bond (Jürgen Reese).

V. Conclusion

Thus, it is obvious that nominal transposition, and in particular, transanthroponimisation, is a rather demanded type of name making in the German-speaking Internet-space. Internet-communication creates very favorable conditions for modifying various precedent names into virtual self-nominations. Moreover, the understanding of a precedent phenomenon is directed in this case not only to decipher the language unit, but also to comprehend the communicative intent of the user, the illocutionary content of nicknames. The extralinguistic component of such self-nominations is the leading one and is most often associated with world-famous cultural personalities. Recognition of the complete anonymization and the “masked” effect of transanthroponimized nicknames is impossible, since such a nominal transaction is usually predetermined by the principle of similarity, likeness of denotata. Consequently, nicknames created by borrowing “strange” anthroponyms can indirectly disclose information about their authors.
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