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Gender Aspects of Contemporary Russian Unconventional Nomination (Based on Nicknames Coined in Gender-Homogeneous Groups)

Abstract

The paper explores the ways the gender of the nominee and the nominator impacts contemporary nicknaming practices. The analysis is based on data collected from 2014 to 2021 from school, college and university students based in Novosibirsk, Russia.

The analysis mainly focuses on the two largest subsamples characterized by gender homogeneity of the participants of a nicknaming act, namely, nicknames, given by males to males (46%) and those bestowed by females onto females (29.4%). Quantitative and interpretational analyses of motivational and connotative aspects of unconventional nomination in the two subsamples shows that Russian nicknaming practices conform to traditional concepts of masculinity (dominance, confidence, largeness, strength, assertiveness, directness, aggressiveness, emotional restraint) and femininity (subordinance, diminutiveness, fragility, vulnerability, emotionality, affection, flexibility, compliance), despite changes in gender roles and gender identities observed in contemporary societies.

Keywords

nickname, gender, unconventional anthroponym, motivation, connotation

1. Introduction

Nicknames as unofficial anthroponyms belong to the sphere of unconventional nomination. As unconventional anthroponyms, nicknames are characterized by informality, instability, flexibility and freedom from legal restraints imposed on formal (conventional) anthroponymicon, thus belonging to “the category of proper names that are not in agreement with the official rules and regulations of a community, as regards the giving of personal names and their usage in public space” (Felecan, 2014, p. 20). In this paper contemporary nicknames and nicknaming practices are approached as culturally informed exponents of gender roles and identities. Within the case study of unconventional anthroponyms of Novosibirsk (Russia) we aim to analyze gender-related aspects of nicknaming practices, manifested in:

1. The role of the nickname-giver vs the role of the nickname-bearer.
2. The attributes of the nickname-bearer which are chosen by the nickname-giver as motives for nickname coinage in homogeneous gender groups, further referred to as male-to-male subsample (MMS) and female-to-female subsample (FFS).
3. Connotation of nicknames depending on their motivation.

According to the definition given on the website of the World Health Organization (n.d.), gender is a social construct which “refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys including norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other”.

The term ‘gender’ is used in this paper with reference to:

1. The participants of nicknaming practices within the following micro-groups: female nominator and female nominee; male nominator and male nominee; male nominator and female nominee; female nominator and male nominee.
2. The nominal grammatical category of the Russian language.

2. Theoretical framework

The present case study is based on:

1. Research papers, directly addressing the issue of gender as represented in nicknames and nicknaming practices (Massolo, 1990; Phillips, 1990; Wilson & Skipper, 1990; de Klerk & Bosch, 1996; Rainbolt, 2002).
2. Dissertations touching upon gender as one of the aspects within more complex research on nicknames, based on case studies of the Smolensk region, Russia (Denisova, 2007); Voronezh, Russia (Pshegorskaya, 2013); Bashkir culture, Russia (Ashirova, 2016); Ng'umbo people, Zambia (Kabaso, 2016); Tambov region, Russia (Morozova, 2016).
3. Case-studies considering modern nicknames circulating in specific cultural and social contexts: American High School (Busse, 1983); South Wales primary school, the UK (Crozier & Dimmock, 1999); the Sydney region of Australia (Chevalier, 2004); Shona-speaking People in Harare, Zimbabwe (Mashiri, 2004); Kuwaiti teenagers (Haggan, 2008); Nigerian school students (Kolawole et al., 2009); university students, Voronezh, Russia (Nedostupova, 2015); Sweden (Gustafsson, 2018).

3. Methodology and algorithm of research

Gender-related aspects of nicknaming practices determine the methodology of our research which entails data collection by means of questionnaire survey, quantitative and qualitative analyses and comparative analysis of subsamples (including Chi-square test).

The research is based on 1,694 nicknames, collected from Novosibirsk institutions of secondary, special vocational and higher education. The gender ratio between respondents is in equal proportion (325 males and

330 females, the difference is not significant at $\chi^2 = 0.075$; χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$).

In the questionnaires respondents were asked to provide the following information about nicknames they know or bear: the nickname itself; explanation of its motivation; comments on connotation; respondents' relation to the nominee; age of the nominator/nominee at the time when the nickname originated; gender of the nominator/nominee.

The comparative analysis of subsamples is conducted according to the following algorithm:

1. Distribution of nicknames into the following subsamples with subsequent quantitative analysis: a) homogeneous gender groups: female nominator and female nominee; male nominator and male nominee; b) heterogeneous gender groups: male nominator and female nominee; female nominator and male nominee.

2. Distribution of nicknames within each subsample according to the motivational patterns into:

- (a) Major nicknaming patterns,¹ including linguistically (internally) motivated nominations (coined on the basis of the nominee's personal name, e.g., *Егерь* [*Yegeer'*]² 'gamekeeper' (cf. German *Jäger* 'hunter') < phonetic association with the first name *Егор* [*Yegor*]; *Плюша* [*Plyusha*] < first name *Полина* [*Polina*], *Лазарь* [*Lazar'*] < clipping of the last name *Лазарев* [*Lazarev*])³ and extra-linguistically (externally) motivated nominations, characterizing the nominee directly, metaphorically or antithetically (e.g., *Рыжая/Рыжий* [*Ryzhaya/Ryzhii*] 'red-haired'; *Эмо* [*Emo*] 'a sad person'; *Карлик* [*Karlik*] 'a tall guy', literally 'dwarf');
- (b) Minor nicknaming patterns, pointed out in the course of analyzing our data as less frequent, which include: mixed nominations, combining

¹ In our research on nicknames we follow the principles of classifying nicknames into internal formations (linguistically motivated, based on a person's name, non-characteristic) and external formations (deriving from extralinguistic matters, characteristic) (Morgan et. al., 1979, p. 33–42).

² English transliteration of a name is given in square brackets.

³ Common diminutives from first names like *Саша* [*Sasha*] < *Александр/Александра* [*Aleksandr/Aleksandra*], *Ваня* [*Vanya*] < *Иван* [*Ivan*], *Ира* [*Ira*] < *Ирина* [*Irina*], *Вика* [*Vika*] < *Виктория* [*Viktoriya*], etc. are not considered nicknames in the Russian culture.

linguistic and extra-linguistic motives (e.g. *Жуча* [*Zhucha*] < from the last name *Жучаева* [*Zhuchayeva*] + always in a good mood like a dog: *Zhucha* is a common dog's name in Russian); hereditary nicknames (e.g., *Ворона* [*Vorona*] 'crow' < 'dark, inherited from his father'); transonomisation (e.g., from social networks, computer games: *Мао* [*Mao*] 'from a nickname in a computer game'); pejorative (*Болван* [*Bolvan*] 'dummy') and affectionate nominations (*Солнышко* [*Solnyshko*] 'sunny', *Котенок* [*Kotenok*] 'kitten').

3. Comparative quantitative and interpretative analyses of major nicknaming patterns in gender homogeneous groups (i.e. MMS, FFS), with the focus on motivation and connotation. The major patterns within these gender groups are under analysis in this paper as the most frequent ones.

4. Gender of nickname-givers and nickname-bearers

Gender-related studies on nicknames connect the role of the (nick)name-giver with a certain status in the micro- or macro-society, implying social influence, power and control (Morgan et al., 1979, p. 115; Massolo, 1990, p. 291; Wilson & Skipper, 1990, p. 316; de Klerk & Bosch, 1996, p. 531; Rainbolt, 2002, p. 136).

The (nick)name-bearer, on the other hand, is placed in the subordinate power position (Gustafsson, 2018, p. 236). Traditionally, women's subordinate social status, "exclusion of women from the world outside the home" (Wilson & Skipper, 1990, p. 316), their limited social interaction (Massolo, 1990) and men's dominant social position (Ashirova, 2016, p. 83) and leadership qualities (Denisova, 2007, pp. 18–19) resulted in male dominance in (nick)naming practices both in the roles of nominators and nominees.

However, the data vary across the studies conducted in different periods of time and referring to different ethnic groups, cultures and subcultures. As regards the number of male nicknames vs female nicknames, the scholars report on a higher ratio of male nominations over female ones in various contexts: certain ethnic societies of Africa – the Ng'umbo people (Kabaso, 2016, p. 157) and the Shona (Mashiri, 2004, p. 43); Russian university contexts

(Nedostupova, 2015, p. 25; Tsepikova, 2018, p. 249); Russian rural contexts (Denisova, 2007, p. 18–19; Morozova, 2016, p. 147).

At the same time, T. V. Busse (1983) noted in a study on Northeastern US high school nicknames that the percentage of female nicknames, though lower than that of male nicknames, showed that nicknaming is no longer a predominantly masculine domain (p. 303). The following studies report on insignificant gender difference in the number of nicknames in the context of Welsh primary school (Crozier & Dimmock, 1999, p. 512), Kuwaiti schools (Haggan, 2008) and Nigerian schools (Kolawole et. al., 2009, p. 116). Gustafsson's research on Swedish nicknames (2018, p. 236), collected from different age groups, agrees with these findings, however the scholar draws attention to uneven distribution of nicknames across the environments in which they are used.

The studies which focus on single-sex micro-societies make an observation that both males and females can be equally active in nicknaming, thus challenging the stereotypes about men as the main nicknamers. Wilson and Skipper (1990), whose research was based on public nicknaming in the All-American Girls Baseball League, state that in situations “where women are accorded equal or more power than men, women will become the nicknamers, and will be just as likely as men to nickname each other” (p. 316). De Klerk & Bosch (1996) make a similar conclusion, based on the survey, conducted among young people from South Africa (p. 529).

In our previous research, which covered 2003–2007 and 2014–2017 (Tsepikova, 2018, p. 249), we concluded that males are twice as active in nickname-giving practices than females. Updated quantitative analysis specifies earlier findings, showing that 60% of nicknames were coined by male nominators as opposed to 40% of nicknames coined by females. The difference is statistically significant at $\chi^2 = 10$ (χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$), but if considered diachronically it shows that the female subsample has been increasing.

Besides, our findings agree with the aforementioned studies, claiming that males attract more nicknames than females. According to our data, the difference is significant at $\chi^2 = 5.1$ (χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$). Moreover, the subsample “male nominator – male nominee” significantly outnumbers the other subsamples. However, unlike Chevalier's survey results (2004, p. 133), the second largest subsample in our research is “female nominator – female nominee” (view Table 1 for details). Thus, in our corpus the largest subsamples are characterized by gender homogeneity of participants of nicknaming practices, whereas in heterogeneous circumstances females seem to bestow

nicknames on males less frequently than males to females. The analysis of the spheres and circumstances in which the latter occurs shows that such nicknames are either given to males behind their back or by charismatic females with leadership qualities, or/and occupying a higher hierarchical position in a certain micro-group (teachers, mothers, senior schoolmates).

Table 1. Dynamics of nicknaming practices across four gender subsamples

Nickname-giver \ Nickname-bearer	Male		Female		Total (nickname-giver)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Male	787	46.5	227	13.4	1014	60
Female	182	10.7	498	29.4	680	40
Total (nickname-bearer)	982	57.4	730	42.6	1694	100

Source: the author's database.

5. The gender of the nickname-bearer and motivational types of nicknames

In the context of gender-related research, scholars attempt to trace the interconnection between the gender of the nominee and the motivational type of nicknames, analyzing the attributes of nickname-bearers which are chosen by nickname-givers as motives for nickname coinage.

Externally motivated characteristic nicknames and internally (linguistically) motivated non-characteristic nicknames are the focus of our research as they represent the major nicknaming patterns. In our corpus they heavily outnumber the other nicknames which comprise the minor patterns (view Table 2 for quantitative data).

Table 2. Sample distribution by motivational patterns

Motivational type	Total	%
Externally motivated nicknames	818	48.3
Internally motivated nicknames	735	43.4
Endearment (pet) names	64	3.8
Nicknames combining internal and external motives	35	2
Pejorative nicknames	25	1.5
Transonymisation (from usernames)	14	0.8
Hereditary nicknames	3	0.2
Total	1694	100

Source: the author's database.

As regards the two fundamental categories of characteristic vs non-characteristic formations, our findings show the following tendencies within the four subsamples which are summed up in Table 3:

1. The number of nicknames is highest in homogeneous subsamples, which means that people bestow nicknames more frequently to their own sex.
2. Male nickname-givers seem to prefer characteristic nicknames either to their own or to the opposite sex, whereas female nickname-givers choose nicknames based on a person's name for their own sex, but with reference to the opposite sex characteristic patterns are more frequent.
3. In FFS internally motivated nicknames are more common, while in other subsamples involving males as nominators and/or nominees nickname-bearers are mostly identified by their external characteristics.

Table 3. Types of nicknames distributed by gender subsamples

Type of nickname	Subsample by gender				Total
	MMS	FFS	MFS ⁴	FMS ⁵	
Externally motivated nicknames	397	199	128	94	818
Internally motivated nicknames	351	243	73	68	735
Minor types	39	56	26	20	141
Total	787	498	227	182	1694

Source: the author's database.

Our further analysis of gender identity as reflected in the major motivational patterns focuses on the most frequent gender subsamples (i.e. MMS, FFS).

6. Gender-related aspects in characteristic nicknames

Within the group of characteristic nicknames, the following gender specific qualities are observed: strength, largeness, hardness and maturity of male nominees (Phillips, 1990; Morozova, 2016, p. 95) as opposed to female qualities of smallness (Gustafsson, 2018, p. 236), childishness and immaturity (Massolo, 1990, p. 287), beauty, pleasantness, kindness and goodness (Phillips, 1990).

According to our data, in MMS nickname-givers choose appearance-based nicknames more often than females (50.9% in MMS vs 36.3% in FFS). Females in their turn choose personality-based nicknames for their sex more often than males to males (28.1% in FFS vs 17.6% in MMS). Nicknames based on appearance are the most frequent in both subsamples.

MMS is characterized by the following unique categories which are not found or very few in FFS:

⁴ MFS stands for a male-to-female subsample.

⁵ FMS stands for a female-to-male subsample.

1. Appearance and physical abilities. Frequent motives, chosen by males to males within the category of appearance include those related to the concept of largeness, viewed mostly negatively (a) or humorously (b, c), depending on the connotation of the quality itself:

- (a) Fat: *Толстый* [*Tolstiy*] ‘fatty’, humorous, offensive; *Кабан* [*Kaban*] ‘boar’, offensive; *Пумба* [*Pumba*] = *Pumba* (a warthog from Disney’s 1994 animated film *The Lion King*), neutral; *Свинка Пеппа* [*Svinka Peppa*] = *Пеппа Pig*, offensive; *Пирог* [*Pirog*] ‘pie’, humorous;
- (b) Big: *Конь* [*Kon’*] ‘horse’, humorous; *Сало-плов* [*Salo-plov*] ‘lard-pilaf’, humorous;
- (c) Athletic build: *Качок* [*Kachok*] ‘beefcake’ (2), neutral, jocular; *Мачо-Ман* [*Macho-Man*], jocular; *Человек-муравей* [*Chelovek-muravey*] ‘ant-man’, neutral.

Nicknames based on physical abilities (skills, strength) mostly have humorous connotations, which may imply explicit or implicit admiration and envy as well as a sense of comradeship: *Ван-Дам* [*Van-Dam*] = *Van Damme*: flexible muscles, humorous; *Геркулес* [*Gerkuless*] = *Hercules*: big and strong, humorous; *Чех* [*Chekh*] ‘Czech’: goal-keeping skills, praising/humorous; *Лось* [*Los’*] ‘elk’: tall and strong basketball-player, offensive/humorous; *Скала* [*Skala*] ‘rock’: big, strong and muscular, humorous, endearing, honorific.

Other specifically male nicknames within the category are those indicating baldness (*Лысый* [*Lysiy*] ‘bald’, neutral, humorous, negative); moustache (*Усач* [*Usach*] ‘moustachioed’, neutral; *Усатая любовь* [*Usataya lyubov’*] ‘moustachy love’, humorous); and beard (*Борода* [*Boroda*] ‘beard’, humorous).

This group of nicknames also includes nominations, based on motives, universal in terms of gender, but most frequent in the male-to-male subsample: a person wearing eye glasses (*Очкарик* [*Ochkarik*] ‘four-eyes’, negative); dark complexion (*Чёрный* [*Chyornyy*] ‘black’, neutral, jocular, offensive; *Цыган* [*Tsygan*] ‘Gypsy’, offensive; *Кочегар* [*Kochegar*] ‘stoker’, neutral); fair complexion and hair colour (*Белый* [*Belyy*] ‘white’, neutral, jocular; *Майонез* [*Mayonez*] ‘mayonnaise’, offensive; *Седой* [*Sedoy*] ‘grey-haired’, humorous).

2. Personality qualities, associated with masculine gender roles and highly regarded among men, though often labelled as neutral:

- (a) Leadership and business qualities, self-confidence: *Атаман* [*Ataman*] ‘chieftain’: ‘leadership qualities, caring like a father’, neutral; *Шеф* [*Shef*]

‘chief’: organizing skills, neutral; *Могучий* [*Moguchiy*] ‘mighty’: “can do everything and anytime”, honorific;

- (b) Age as specifically masculine category, associated with experience: *Дед* [*Ded*] ‘old man’, 1) the oldest among friends, neutral; 2) experienced, neutral; *Старый* [*Staryy*] ‘old’ (2), the oldest among friends, neutral, positive.

Male personal qualities that are mocked by males include:

1. Stereotypically masculine behaviours as regards the opposite sex, jocular: *Бабник* [*Babnik*] ‘Womanizer’; *Даман* [*Daman*]: paronomasia from *дама* ‘dame’, ‘lady-killer’.

2. Different aspects of what is considered unmanly behaviour, labelled as offensive or jocular:

- (a) Lack of skills: *Инвалид* [*Invalid*] ‘disabled’, bad at playing football; *Криворукий* [*Krivorukiy*] ‘clumsy, butterfingers’;
- (b) Inertness, laziness, slow reaction: *Телега* [*Teleza*] ‘cart’; *Слоупок* [*Sloupok*] ‘slowpoke’; *Тупой* [*Turoy*] ‘dumb’; *Тормоз* [*Tormoz*] ‘brake’;
- (c) Hot temper, inability to control emotions: *Псих* [*Psikh*] ‘psycho’; *Шизя* [*Shizya*], colloq. ‘schizophrenic’;
- (d) Poor sense of humour: *Ваганыч* [*Vaganych*] (ironical allusion to a Soviet/Russian comedian E. Petrosyan), “due to special merit in the sphere of humour”.

3. Qualities stereotypically associated with feminine behaviours:

- (a) Obsession with good looks: *Сладкий* [*Sladkiy*] ‘sweet’, neutral;
- (b) Grouchiness, associated with old age, offensive: *Бабка* [*Babka*] derogatory ‘old woman’: “always complains and grumbles”; *Баба Зина* [*Baba Zina*] ‘Grandma Zina’, “a person is always annoyed and complaining”.

It is notable that such categories as occupation and nationality/ethnicity serve as frequent motives of nicknames among males (10 and 16 nominations respectively), whereas, judging by our corpus data, females seem to take less interest in these aspects as sources of unconventional nomination. The reason for this tendency can be linked with historical roles of males as competitors (warriors, protectors and breadwinners). Thus, even now such nicknames serve as some of the basic identity markers of masculinity and masculine interaction, labelling social status or indicating the misfits.

The analysis of characteristic nicknames within FFS shows a limited number of motives referring to uniquely feminine attributes. For example, in the category of appearance-based nicknames the only unique motives, which are not found in MMS, are unnatural hair colour (*Кикимора* [*Kikimora*], an allusion to an ugly female spirit from Russian folklore that lives in the swamp, has straggly hair and clothes made of moss and grass, offensive; *Баклажан* [*Baklzhan*] ‘aubergine/eggplant’, purple hair colour, jocular; *Фиолетка* [*Fioletka*], violet hair colour, jocular), makeup skills (*Мисс графичность* [*Miss grafichnost*] ‘Miss graphicality’, hopeless at drawing eyebrows, offensive), and having a long neck (*Гусь* [*Gus*] ‘goose’, offensive). Moreover, unlike in MMS, reference to dark hair colour among females is not found at all and blond colour has only one occurrence: *Блондин* [*Blondin*] ‘blond’, humorous. Interestingly, nicknames referring to red hair colour are frequent in both subsamples. Nominations which are chosen in this case are unisex,⁶ represented by either direct nominations or metaphors alluding to orange objects: *Морковка* [*Morkovka*] ‘carrot’, humorous; *Апельсин* [*Apel'sin*] ‘Orange (fruit)’, endearing; *Ржавая* [*Rzhavaya*] ‘rusty’, funny, etc.

Comparative analysis of other appearance-based motives shows that, at least in our corpus, FFS lacks nicknames related to having a skinny constitution. ‘Skinny’ is the attribute generally considered desirable and positive among women, thus lacking critical appeal, which is a trigger in characteristic nicknaming.⁷ Such tendencies in FFS respond to smallness, fragility, vulnerability as essentially feminine qualities. Nicknames which highlight the opposite qualities of fatness and largeness, are obviously offensive (*Дирижабль* [*Dirizhabl'*] ‘airship, dirigible balloon’; *Лошадь* [*Loshad'*] ‘mare’; *Корова* [*Korova*] ‘cow’), unless used in certain pragmatic situations among family and friends (*Булочка* [*Bulochka*] ‘bun’, with reference to a plump child).

⁶ Some other nicknames of the unisex kind are motivated by such qualities as short or tall height; curly hair; big eyes; full lips; plump cheeks; long nose. In most of these cases nominators resort to the corpus of already existing unconventional nominations which can be universally applied to any gender group.

⁷ The latter motive is not frequent in MMS either: in our corpus there are two such nominations: *Холст* [*Kholst*] ‘canvas’; *Дрыщун* [*Dryshchuan*], a derivative from ‘dryshsh’, a derogatory nomination of a skinny person. Both of them are labelled as offensive or derisive, reflecting a stereotype about muscular physique as a desired masculine attribute, associated with strength as opposed to skinny physique, which implies weakness and impossibility to protect.

Nicknames also record some exponents of masculinity in females, labelled as jocular (*Качок* [*Kachok*] ‘beefcake’), and offensive (*Якубович* [*Yakubovich*], a Russian showman with a thick moustache: “the girl with a moustache”).

Considering nicknames in FFS, based on personality features, reflecting stereotypical female qualities, the following socio-cultural gender types may be pointed out:

- (1) Garrulous and talkative, annoying, grouchy (offensive): *Курица* [*Kuritsa*] ‘hen’; *Бабка* [*Babka*] ‘old woman’ + pejorative suffix;
- (2) Old-fashioned clothes and views (offensive): *Баба Настя* [*Baba Nastya*] ‘Granny Nastya’;
- (3) Shy, quiet, inconspicuous, small (endearing, neutral): *Мышка* [*Myshka*] ‘little mouse’ (3); *Серая Мышка* [*Seraya Myshka*] ‘gray mouse’;
- (4) An unattractive, but self-confident girl (offensive): *Девочка – эмансипе* [*Devochka – emantsipe*] ‘emancipated girl’;
- (5) Bad manners and poor sense of style, stereotypical of country women and girls (offensive): *Людка* [*Lyudka*] < allusion to the Russian movie “Love and Pigeons”;
- (6) Females’ affection for cute fluffy creatures (endearing, humorous): *Белка* [*Belka*] ‘squirrel’; *Енот* [*Enot*] ‘raccoon’.

Besides gender-related motivation on the semantic level, nicknames in FFS are characterized by specifically feminine morphological patterns with:

- (1) Diminutive suffixes, added to nouns regardless of their grammatical gender: *Пандочка* [*Pandochka*] < ‘panda’ + diminutive suffix, humorous; *Хомячок* [*Khomyachok*] ‘little hamster’, positive; *Лёвушка* [*Lyovushka*] ‘little lion’, endearing;
- (2) Feminine pejorative suffixes *-иха*; *-юха*: *Богомолиха* [*Bogomolikha*] ‘a religious woman’; *Свинюха* [*Svinyukha*] ‘swine’, an untidy person;
- (3) Feminine suffixes with honorific connotation: *Биологиня* [*Biologinya*] < a blend of *биология* [*biologiya*] ‘biology’ and *богиня* [*boginya*] ‘goddess’, the teacher’s honorific nickname;
- (4) A feminine patronymic suffix *-овна* [*-ovna*] added to an appellative: *Людоедовна* [*Lyudoyedovna*] < *людоед* [*lyudoyed*] ‘cannibal’, humorous.

Summarizing gender specificity of characteristic nicknames and mechanisms of their coinage we conducted the quantitative analysis of the following two categories across the subsamples (for quantitative data refer to Table 4):

- (1) Direct/indexical nomination (descriptive and metonymical nicknames, directly naming an obvious quality, requiring little or no creative effort);
- (2) Iconic nomination (metaphor, antonomasia) or nomination based on language play (irony, paronomasia, combination of motives), referring to the nominee's qualities indirectly, more evasively, which requires more complex cognitive processing of a nickname-bearer's personality.

The analysis shows that:

- (1) In FFS there is a significant difference between the two groups of mechanisms, the preference given to indirect nominations ($\chi^2 = 16.5$; χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$);
- (2) In MMS the two groups are in almost equal proportion (the difference is not significant at $\chi^2 = 0.029$; χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$). Besides, a specific feature of MMS is trite nicknames, representing cases of direct nomination, which lost their offensive connotation due to frequency of circulation. As a result, their characteristic function is overshadowed by the pragmatic function of establishing solidarity within the group.

Table 4. Mechanisms of coining characteristic nicknames across the subsamples

Mechanism	Gender subsample	MMS		FFS	
		number	%	number	%
Indexical nomination		201	50.6	66	33.2
Indirect (creative) nomination		196	49.4	133	66.8
Total		397	100	199	100

Source: the author's database.

In terms of pragmatics and connotation characteristic nicknames in the subsamples are distributed in the following way (see Table 5). Humorous nicknames are in almost equal proportion in both subsamples with 30.5% in MMS and 29.5% in FFS. This is the most frequent group of nicknames in FFS, whereas in MMS neutral nicknames are the most numerous (33.5% as compared to 23.6% in FFS, the difference is significant at $\chi^2 = 4.15$; χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$). The difference in predominant groups may reflect different attitudes

to explicit display of emotions, the latter being considered as typically feminine. Besides, there is a significant difference across the subsamples as regards the extremes, i.e. positive and derogatory connotations. In MMS 27.2% characteristic nicknames are labelled as offensive as opposed to 7% labelled positive (the difference is significant at $\chi^2 = 58.29$; χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$). In FFS however the ratio is almost equal (the difference is not significant at $\chi^2 = 0.43$; χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$). The results correspond to such masculine behavioral and affective traits as toughness, power, assertiveness, and aggressiveness (Canham, 2009, p. 91).

Table 5. Positive and negative connotation of characteristic nicknames across the subsamples

Connotation	Gender subsample	MMS		FFS	
		number	%	number	%
offensive		108	27.2	42	21.1
positive		28	7	49	24.6
neutral		133	33.5	47	23.6
humorous		121	30.5	58	29.2
connotation not specified		7	1.8	3	1.5
Total		397	100	199	100

Source: the author's database.

7. Gender-related aspects in linguistically motivated nicknames

In the group of linguistically motivated nicknames, i.e. nicknames, inspired by the name of a person, the following ways of reference are chosen:

- (1) Asemic nicknames, i.e., nicknames lacking inner form;
- (2) Meaningful nicknames, playing on phonetic or collocational associations with a personal name, which may result in its false etymology;
- (3) Meaningful nicknames, referring to the etymology of a personal name.

The first pattern is represented by conventional and unconventional personal name clippings, derivatives, abbreviations, diminutives, lacking inner form. Their pragmatic characteristics are limited to familiarity and their connotation ranges from neutral to humorous and endearing, implying relations of solidarity and friendliness with a very low proportion of offensive nicknames in both subsamples (see Table 6). Neutral connotations prevail in MMS, while in FFS an endearing attitude is the most frequent:

MMS: *Фома* [*Foma*] < last name *Фомичев* [*Fomichev*], neutral; *Дуда* [*Duda*] < last name *Дударев* [*Dudaev*], humorous; *Дорохня* [*Dorokhnyu*] < last name *Дорохов* [*Dorokhov*], offensive;

FFS: *Аношка* [*Anoshka*] < last name *Аношина* [*Anoshina*], positive; *Цика* [*Tsika*] < last name *Цикаленко* [*Tsikalenko*], neutral; *Филипок* [*Filipok*] < last name *Филипова* [*Filipova*], offensive.

Table 6. Connotation of asemic nicknames, based on meaningless transformation of the nominee's formal name (quantitative data)

Subsample by gender	Connotation				Total
	Offensive	Endearing	Neutral	Humorous	
MMS	3	21	102	41	167
FFS	3	60	51	42	156

Source: the author's database.

A striking gender-based pattern within this category is the transformation of official forms of address to teachers (first name + patronymic) by substituting one or each of the components of the formula by its diminutive or pejorative alternative, showing students' positive or negative attitude. As the majority of teachers in Russia are female, this pattern can be characterized as both gender- and culture-specific. In FFS there are 14 nominations of this type: *Иринушка* [*Irinushka*] < *Ирина Владимировна* [*Irina Vladimirovna*], the teacher of methodology, 'very kind and gentle', endearing; *Аллочка Георгиевничка* [*Allochka Georgievnochka*] < from the first name + the patronymic *Алла Георгиевна* [*Alla Georgievna*], positive; *Таня-Ваня* [*Tanya-Vanya*] < from the first name + the patronymic *Татьяна Ивановна* [*Tatyana Ivanovna*], neutral; *Николашка* [*Nikolashka*] < from the patronymic *Николаевна* [*Nikolayevna*] + dislike of the teacher, jocular.

The second pattern suggests a free interpretation or misinterpretation and distortion of a person's name, imposing an etymology which the name does not actually possess. Moreover, it can develop false and undesirable associations with a nickname-bearer's personality. Thus, the names of this category are more likely to demonstrate a range of attitudes and relations between the nominator and the nominee:

MMS: *Санчоус* [*Sanchous*] < first name diminutive *Sasha* + phonetic association with *anchovy*, positive; *Гагарин* [*Gagarin*] < first name *Юрий* [*Yuriy*] + inevitable association with Yuri Gagarin, neutral; *Паушем* [*Pashtet*] < first name diminutive *Пауша* [*Pasha*] + phonetic association with *паушем* [*pashtet*] 'pâté', offensive;

FFS: *Геркулес* [*Gerkules*] 'Hercules' < last name *Герасимова* [*Gerasimova*], phonetic association, jocular; *Футболка* [*Futbolka*] = 'T-shirt' < first name pejorative *Майка* [*Mayka*] (from *Майя* [*Mayya*]), homonymous with *майка* 'a singlet, sleeveless shirt' (piece of clothing from the same thematic group as a T-shirt), humorous.

Interestingly, only one nickname of this type is labelled as offensive in FFS compared to 12 nominations with negative connotation in MMS. Another striking difference is in the proportion of neutral and endearing nicknames: the former are the most frequent in MMS, but the second least frequent in FFS; the latter are the least frequent in MMS but the most frequent (together with humorous ones) in FFS (see Table 7 for detail).

Table 7. Connotation of nicknames, based on false etymology of the nominee's formal name (quantitative data)

Subsample by gender	Connotation				Total
	Offensive	Endearing	Neutral	Humorous	
MMS	12	11	54	32	109
FFS	1	24	10	24	59

Source: the author's database.

The third pattern is applied to a person's name (most frequently, last name) with transparent etymology: nicknames are formed by means of clipping, clipping and suffixation, or in rarer cases, lexico-semantic transformations of the official name:

MMS: *Беркут* [*Berkut*] ‘golden eagle’ < last name *Соколов* [*Sokolov*] (cf. *сокол* ‘falcon’), derived from the appellative meaning ‘eagle’, neutral; *Усик* [*Usik*] ‘moustache’ < last name *Усов* [*Usov*] + diminutive suffix, humorous; *Баран* [*Baran*] ‘ram’ < last name *Баранов* [*Baranov*], offensive; *Гусёныш* [*Gusyonysh*] ‘gosling’ < last name *Гусев* [*Gusev*] + diminutive suffix, endearing;

FFS: *Суббота* [*Subbota*] ‘Saturday’ < last name *Субботина* [*Subbotina*], neutral; *Пчела* [*Pchela*] ‘bee’ < last name *Пчельникова* [*Pchel'nikova*], jocular; *Колбаса* [*Kolbasa*] ‘sausage’ < last name *Колбасова* [*Kolbasova*], offensive; *Воробушек* [*Vorobushek*] ‘little sparrow’ < last name *Воробьева* [*Vorob'yeva*] + diminutive suffix, endearing.

Connotations within this pattern vary, depending on extralinguistic factors (relations and attitudes in the group) and linguistic factors (connotation of the last name prototype) (see Table 8).

Table 8. Connotation of nicknames, based on etymology of the nominee's formal name (quantitative data)

Subsample by gender	Connotation					Total
	Offensive	Endearing	Neutral	Humorous		
MMS	3	7	41	24	75	
FFS	5	8	6	9	28	

Source: the author's database.

Thus, as regards gender-specific features of nicknames formed from personal names, the following tendencies can be observed:

1. The most frequent bases for nicknames in both subsamples are surnames (76% in MMS and 57% in FFM), followed by first names (21% in MMS and 31% in FFM).
2. Asemic nicknames are the most frequent nominations, serving as the quickest and easiest way of establishing solidarity and informality.
3. The use of diminutive suffixes when coining nicknames is characteristic of all three types of linguistically motivated nicknames in FFS. The results are

in correspondence with previous findings, stating that female nicknames tend to evolve from a person's first or last name by means of clipping with subsequent suffixation (de Klerk & Bosch, 1996, p. 539; Pshegor'skaya, 2013, p. 16), whereas male nicknames are either formed by means of clipping (Pshegor'skaya, 2013, p. 16), or represent a complete transformation of a person's name (de Klerk & Bosch, 1996, p. 532).

Thus, lengthening of a name is viewed as a linguistic exponent of femininity, iconically reflecting cases in the language when nouns of feminine gender are formed as derivatives from masculine nouns which appear to be primary and initial (Kravchenko, 2002, p. 4). On the other hand, exponents of masculinity show the reverse direction towards language economy (shortening, return to the initial form, the prototype), or a complete distortion of the prototype.

4. The predominant connotation of nicknames in MMS is neutral (56%) whereas in FFS endearing nominations prevail (38%), supporting the opposition "emotional restrain – emotional openness" as one of stereotypical differences between genders.

5. In FFS offensive nicknames based on the etymology of a person's name are more frequent than offensive nicknames based on false etymology; in MMS the reverse ratio is observed. Judging by the data from both subsamples nicknames based on the etymology of the nominee's official name are labelled offensive when the appellative stem from which the name originates has negative connotation or acquires it when applied to a human: *Колбаса* [*Kolbasa*] 'sausage' < last name *Колбасова* [*Kolbasova*], offensive (FFS); *Баран* [*Baran*] 'ram' < last name *Баранов* [*Baranov*], offensive (MMS); *Дятел* [*Dyatel*] 'woodpecker' < last name *Дятлов* [*Dyatlov*], offensive (MMS).⁸ Nevertheless, explicating the real motives behind a person's name is the easiest and safest way to coin an offensive nickname and avoid responsibility for choosing the nomination with pejorative connotation as such nicknames merely revive the motive inherent in the official name itself. The case is different with false etymology, when nominators are less discreet in their

⁸ *Колбаса* may bring negative associations with being overweight; *Баран* and *Дятел* are common call-names for unintelligent or slow-witted persons.

intention to offend the nominee by distorting the form, motivation and connotation of the official name: *Пень* [*Pen'*] / 'tree stump' < last name *Пинигин* [*Pinigin*], offensive; *Павлин* [*Pavlin*] 'peacock' < first name *Павел* [*Pavel*], offensive; *Кулич* [*Kulich*] 'Easter cake' < rhyming with the paternal name *Ильич* [*Il'ich*], offensive. We suggest that low frequency of offensive nicknames based on false etymology in FFS can be connected with such female behaviour patterns as conflict avoidance and evasiveness when it comes to explicating negative attitudes. However, this conclusion is preliminary and requires further consideration.

Table 9 sums up quantitative data concerning the proportion of nicknames across the two gender subsamples under analysis.

Table 9. Formation patterns of linguistically motivated nicknames across the gender subsamples

Pattern	Subsample	MMS		FFS	
		number	%	number	%
Asemic (meaningless transformations)		167	47.58	156	64.2
Meaningful (false etymology, distortion of names)		109	31.06	59	24.28
Meaningful (revival of etymology)		75	21.36	28	11.52
Total		351		243	

Source: the author's database.

8. Conclusion

In the course of quantitative and interpretational analyses the following gender-related aspects of Russian nicknaming practices were pointed out:

1. Regarding the gender of the participants of a nicknaming act, the largest subsamples are characterized by gender homogeneity: 46% of nicknames originating among males and 29.4% of nominations among females.

2. Analysis of two major motivational types shows that in MMS characteristic nicknames are in higher proportion to non-characteristic ones (50.4% and 44.6% respectively), whereas in FFS the tendency is exactly the reverse: 48.8% of nicknames are non-characteristic and 40% are characteristic. Though the difference is not significant in both subsamples,⁹ characteristic nicknames in MMS demonstrate a wider range of motives and categories. On the other hand, female nickname-givers are more creative in terms of mechanisms of nickname coinage, choosing metaphorical nominations and nominations based on language play more often than males, who prefer to address other members of their sex with nicknames, directly pointing at a certain attribute. These tendencies can be connected with female evasiveness and conflict avoidance vs male directness in expressing judgements and attitudes.

3. Analysis of pragmatic aspects of characteristic nicknaming, expressed through connotation, shows the tendency towards humorous and offensive nominations in MMS; in FFS humorous nominations also prevail, but endearing, negative and neutral nicknames are in equal proportion. However, most non-characteristic nicknames coined on the basis of personal names are labelled as neutral in MMS, and as endearing in FFS.

These aspects of nicknaming practices reflect the pragmatic functions of nicknames as indicators of human relations in general and gender identity in particular. Thus, nicknaming among males is considered as manifestation of close bonds, or ties of “mateship” (Chevalier, 2004, pp. 133, 135), solidarity, implying both inclusion and exclusion (Gustafsson, 2018, p. 236), the latter case resulting in hurtful nominations towards both male and female nominees. However, studies of African linguocultures also note “a highly significant stronger tendency among females to use nicknames as a signal of solidarity and friendship” (de Klerk & Bosch, 1996, p. 532). The same observation is made by P. Mashiri (2004): “female nicknames occur most frequently as intimate or solidarity markers” (p. 43). Thus, solidarity is a universal function of nicknames, while exclusion is its inseparable counterpart. Hence, though nicknames for females are considered to be “gentler, more childish and more affectionate than male nicknames” (de Klerk & Bosch,

⁹ In MMS the difference is not significant at $\chi^2 = 0.75$; in FFS the difference is not significant at $\chi^2 = 1.58$ (χ^2 value = 3.841, $p \leq 0.05$, $df = 1$).

1996, p. 539), they can still be used in a critical and derogatory way regardless of the gender of the nominees, depending upon their status in the group, micro- or macro-society.

To sum up, despite changes in gender roles and gender identities affecting contemporary societies, participation in nicknaming practices, motivational patterns and pragmatics of unconventional nomination within our case study conform to traditional concepts of masculinity (dominance, confidence, largeness, strength, assertiveness, directness, aggressiveness, emotional restraint) and femininity (subordination, diminutiveness, fragility, vulnerability, concern about appearance, emotionality, affection, flexibility, compliance).

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