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**Names on the Internet:
Towards Electronic Socio-onom@stics**

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PhD Thesis

University of Edinburgh

2015

Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this thesis has been written by me and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signature

Date

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Lara Ryazanova-Clarke and Dr Alan Macniven, for their engagement and always valuable feedback. Thank you for sharing your priceless time and knowledge with me.

I would like to thank Chris Tolland, my manager at work, who helped me greatly to accommodate working and studying.

My warm thanks go to my family, friends and colleagues for their understanding and support.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pass my special thanks to Prof. Leonarda Dacewicz, my MA supervisor, the person who sparked my interest in names.

Abstract

The Internet represents an abundant source material for linguistic research, which continues to pose new challenges and opportunities on how language is used by its speakers. Its personal naming system, for example, has remained largely unexplored. Of the many facets of names on the Internet awaiting closer scrutiny, the phenomenon of usernames is perhaps the most fundamental. This thesis investigates the role they play in online life, the most suitable methods to approach them, and how they compare with the names used offline and where their place is in onomastics in general.

With people's names inevitably connected with one or another aspect of identity, this work focuses on the relationship between usernames and online identities. The data has been gathered from a forum on the Russian-speaking sector of the Internet (RuNet) and comprises all registered usernames (676 at the time of collection) as well as an extensive and methodically selected sample of users' conversations. As a general analytical framework, it utilises Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology, which conceptualises identity as a result of the ongoing interaction that people negotiate and achieve in everyday life rather than a set of inherent inner qualities. More specifically, the following methodological tools devised by Sacks (e.g. 1995, 1984a, 1984b) have been used to perform the analysis: Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) to categorise the usernames of the forum participants, and Conversation Analysis (CA), to observe how usernames contribute to the construction of individual identities. Finally, the concept of Stance, as presented by Du Bois (2007), has been used as a lens to identify relevant evidence in the conversation samples.

The analysis has demonstrated the need for a systematic categorisation of usernames. The way in which they associate sets of attributes, facilitates the allocation of named entities as members of certain categories of persons. Both linguistic and typographic elements of usernames contribute to how they are perceived and what impression they create. It is also argued that usernames have an important role to play in the active and ongoing construction of individual identities.

The study concludes that CMC participants operate their usernames as meaningful linguistic devices to construct and co-construct each other's identities. CA and MCD are confirmed to be relevant methods to analyse onomastic data. This study has generated a reliable body of evidence for the assertion that usernames are far from meaningless, and demonstrates, moreover, how their meanings are established. In so doing, it constitutes an important contribution to onomastic theory with the potential to shed new light on personal naming in general.

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INTRODUCTION

Naming is a universal phenomenon – no single society in the world has been discovered that uses no names. We name ourselves as well as important elements of our surroundings: countries, towns and streets where we live, institutions where we work, pets that we adopt, stars that we discover, and deities that we believe in, as well as ships, trees, hurricanes and so on. Many people invest a lot of time and energy in finding suitable names for their children. Names constitute an inseparable component of our existence and a significant aspect of human linguistic activity. Not surprisingly then, a number of scholars as well as non-professional enthusiasts have found names an exciting subject of investigation. The discipline that studies names is called onomastics. The subdivision that focuses on **anthroponyms** – names of human beings is **anthroponomastics**, whereas the term **anthroponymy** denotes a collection of anthroponyms¹.

Scientific inquiry into proper names can be dated to the beginning of the nineteenth century and started in the fields of history and philology. The analysis focused on revealing etymologies of names, which constitute important research materials for the history of habitation (Blanár, 2009: 89–92). Nowadays, although still comparatively independent, onomastics has developed connections with a significant number of other fields and disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology, politics, psychology, sociology, cultural geography, religion, business, cartography, folklore, genealogy, history, lexicography, literature and orthography as well as other branches of linguistics (Blanár, 2009: 90; Algeo and Algeo, 2000: 265).

Onomastic evidence is an important contributor to investigating linguo-cultural influences and change as well as social phenomena. According to Van Langendonck (2007: 307–309), naming is ‘a sensitive barometer for the measurement of social development’ due to the flexibility and adaptability of names. Onomasticon is easily renewed and altered; names are thus likely to reflect socio-cultural processes and changes much faster and more sharply than the rest of language.

¹ <http://www.icosweb.net/index.php/whatis-onomastics.html>.

There are various aspects of naming practices that can be studied in terms of how they are created and used, how they are distributed socially and geographically, or how they transform over time. Names may constitute evidence related to phenomena that define our functioning as social beings: linguistic, political, religious, ethical and other phenomena of socio-cultural realities, which can be observed nationally or locally (e.g. in specific towns and villages), in social groups (e.g. class or gender), in various types of communities (such as ethnic or religious), and across languages and cultures. Data might be excerpted from both historical and contemporary resources.

In this work, I am turning to a comparatively new – but enormously rich – source of onomastic data, which, I feel, has not yet received the appreciation that it deserves from onomasticians. I am going to focus on Internet anthroponymy – names that people use online. The Internet site that I have selected for the analysis is a forum that is a part of Russian Internet, or RuNet. The term RuNet I am using to refer to sites addressed to Russian-speaking users, rather than to Internet infrastructure in Russia or the body of sites in the .ru domain, thus, to refer to language rather than to geographical location, which reflects the structure of Russian online community that includes millions of users outside the Russian territory. In this regard, I follow Gorny (2006: 26), who defines RuNet as:

[A] totality of information, communications and activities which occur on the Internet, mostly in Russian language, no matter where resources and users are physically located, and which are somehow linked to Russian culture and Russian cultural identity.

The forum selected for the study is an apt illustration of international Russian-speaking community: its founder and chief administrator lives in Germany and her first moderator is an Israel-based Ukrainian; the site itself belongs to .net domain. The analysed data comprises all registered anthroponyms (676 at the time of collection) as well as samples of conversations.

The Internet is an important part of our socio-cultural reality – and an important part of our today's socio-cultural activity is carried out online – although both worldwide and in Russia not everyone has Internet access.² From information resource, via

² For details see <http://www.internetlivestats.com/>

banking, working and education, to shopping, chatting, dating and gaming, the Internet supports many aspects of our lives. The virtual ‘settlement’ is equally interesting and important as one offline, and names on the Internet might be a particularly sensitive barometer of social phenomena, as they seem even more flexible than other names.

We have a unique opportunity to observe the development of a new onomastic phenomenon from the very beginnings and make immediate records. What is more, the data is exceptionally easily accessible for those who have access to the Internet. Yet names on the Internet have so far received only modest interest in the field of name studies. It is remarkable that it was only in December 2012 that the leading journal of onomastics *Names* 60 (4) published a special issue ‘Names and the Internet’, containing five articles on Internet naming (amongst them two on names for people: Hassa, 2012 on usernames and Kelley, 2012 on guild names in online gaming), having admitted that onomasticians had ‘missed’ the phenomenon. However, since then, not a single article on any type of names on the Internet has appeared in this journal.³ In another important journal, *Onoma*, published by The International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS), to my knowledge, no article on Internet naming has ever appeared. On the recent conference of ICOS in 2014, amongst nearly 200 presentations, just three related to Internet naming, and on the previous, in 2011, only two.

This does not mean that usernames are not studied at all. Some papers have been published in national onomastic or linguistic journals (which, however, renders them difficult to access) or in sources generally unrelated to onomastics. For example, Kołodziejczyk (2004), Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003) and Rutkiewicz (1999) offer attempts of description and the classification of usernames in Polish journals. Some examples of classifications are also available in English (Lev and Lewinsky, 2004; Scheidt, 2001; Bechar-Israeli, 1995). Van Langendonck (2007) and Sidorova (2006) included usernames in their books as part of their topics: as an example of unofficial names in names’ typology, and as an aspect of Internet linguistics respectively.

³ The recent issue is *Names* 63 (2), published in June 2015.

Swennen (2001) includes some demographic and statistical information regarding the distribution of usernames based on a survey (in Dutch). Cotoc (2014) analyses usernames in comparison to a class of literary names, while Graham and Gosling (2012) analyse them as a reflection of personality types. A number of works present usernames as an element of Internet discourse in relation to various aspects of identity – Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008), Stommel (2007), Androutsopoulos (2006), Heisler and Crabill (2006), Scheidt (2001), Desser (2000), Zhichkina and Belinskaia (1999), Bays (1998), Danet et al. (1997), and Jaffe et al. (1995) – the most frequent amongst these aspects being gender.

This shows that usernames enable a wide range of inquiry and approaches. However, they have not been exhaustively documented; this makes the account fragmentary, which is why it is difficult to see a wider picture and draw general conclusions. There are plenty of Internet settings in which naming patterns have not been observed – across modes of communication, types of communities, language sectors, etc. – especially given that the Internet is constantly evolving and developing new genres and formats. In the first edition of *Language and the Internet*, arguably the first book-size work on the Internet linguistics, Crystal (2001) recognised five Internet situations: electronic mail, synchronous and asynchronous chat groups, virtual worlds and the World Wide Web. He updated the second edition with two more, blogs and instant messengers (Crystal, 2006), and just two years later he stressed that it needs another revision because such domains as YouTube, MySpace and FaceBook have appeared in the meantime (Crystal, 2007–2008: 40). Each Internet environment has its own naming regulations; on the other hand, it might be reckoned that the individual choice will also differ depending on many factors, such as the purpose of communication.

For a comprehensible account of usernames as a phenomenon and its characteristics we need comparable sets of data: from various types of communities, across various languages, etc. To enable diachronic inquiry, we need to revisit the studied sites, keeping in mind that the Internet environment changes more rapidly than the offline one. As Crystal (2006: 257) puts it:

It seems to be a standard convention for books dealing with digital technology to begin or end by warning their readers that everything they contain is going to be soon out of date; and a linguistic perspective on the subject is no exception. Any attempt to characterize the language of the Internet, whether as a whole or with reference to one of its constituent situations, immediately runs up against the transience of the technology. The different arenas of communication described in earlier chapters will not remain as they are for long, given that the technological developments upon which they rely are constantly evolving, putting users under constant pressure to adapt their language to the demands of new contexts, and giving them fresh opportunities to interact in novel ways.

Next, the works themselves have their limitations. Those describing usernames as a category, first, tend to draw far-reaching generalisations based only on their own samples, and second, their accounts seem to lack in-depth theoretical analyses behind them. Some relate to material collected unsystematically, e.g. excerpted from various IRC (Internet Relay Chat) channels for analysis in a single study. Other works focus only on particular themes in usernames, such as ethnicity and nationality, or gender, which views the selected environment from a restricted perspective and does not present its full anthroponymy.

Objectives and research questions

The central research objective of this work is to present usernames as devices of identity construction, which appears to be their key role as components of computer-mediated communication (CMC). To do this, I adopt, broadly speaking, a socio-nomastic perspective, meaning that the focus of the study is on the relationship between language and social reality, where names are approached as linguistic tools of social actions. My focus will be on the relation between names and identity. More specifically, I utilise an ethnomethodological research framework – namely, Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) to show how usernames can be generally read as terms of categorisation, and Conversation Analysis (CA) to observe how they are handled by participants in specific interactions to construct individual identities.

The analysis of the collected data will tackle the following key points:

- What are the meaningful elements in both the form and content of usernames that determine their perception?
- How do these elements relate to various aspects of identity?
- What can the relation between names and identity tell us about the meaning of names?
- How can CA as a research method contribute to developing the theory of names?

However, there are two other aspects to this study that I am going to address in order to embed the analysis in the broader context of onomastic study, as well as to inform the design of the study and selected methodology.

Firstly, with the literature being so scarce, there are many aspects of usernames as a class of names that need examination. To establish their characteristics, I will carry out a comparative analysis of usernames and three other anthroponomastic classes – pseudonyms, nicknames and given names – based on anthroponomastic research to date. Then, I will also aim at addressing the theoretical questions of onomastics, especially the issues of the meaning and functioning of names.

Due to the fact that the name of one of the methodological tools (MCA) that I am going to use contains the term ‘categorisation’, I reserve this term for talking about membership categories, i.e. groups to which people might be ascribed. To avoid confusion, I will refer to categorisation of names as **classification** and to categories of names as **classes**.

The present work is organised into three main units. The first unit presents the theoretical questions related to onomastics and characterises usernames as a class of names. The second unit explains understanding of the concept of identity used in this work, sets out the methodological framework, and relates it to names. It also presents the analysis of collected usernames as tools of membership categorisation. The third unit explains how analyses of conversations can serve as a strategy to observe and evidence the role of usernames in the process of identity construction. It also indicates what these observations may tell us about the meaning of names, which is illustrated in the case study. The key observations and questions that appeared in the

process of writing as well as general reflections that grew out of it can be found in 'Conclusions' at the end.

Research ethics online

The Internet puts the notions of authorship, ownership, anonymity and privacy into a new perspective. In CMC, it is difficult to distinguish between public and private, identified and anonymous, and published and unpublished, which raises concerns about how to treat material excerpted from the Internet, especially in terms of regulations regarding copyrights and data protection. Concerns are justified, especially as participants' opinions may vary: some seek publicity within an environment that others perceive as a private space (Hudson and Bruckman, 2004:127-129).

What approach to choose to the research material depends on the type of research in terms of data collection. The idea of *observational research* that I am pursuing in this work is that data collection does not require interaction with the producer. The communication is publicly posted and is accessible to any Internet user. In this case, the data can be considered not private. It also depends on the object of study. If the study involves observation of public behaviour of an individual human subject, care should be taken to not disclose information that may directly or indirectly identify the subject, put them 'at risk of criminal or civic liability', or in any way affect their 'financial standing, employability or reputation'. It should be noted that different attitudes may apply to minors or otherwise vulnerable participants. Regulations of specific websites regarding privacy should also be taken into account, as well as tools provided by the sites for privacy protection (Moreno et al., 2013: 709-710).

Herring (1997: 22) proposes the following approach to the data collected online 'treat all limited access interaction as private, and treat all unlimited access interaction as public'. However, as she remarks (1997: 19-20), the problem is that some users may lightheartedly give away personal information. Attention should be paid to not abusing such opportunity even if the data is made public. On the other hand, sources may deserve credit for their participation. If this is the case, the material posted on the Internet should be treated as copyrighted and fully cited as if it

were published in a written source, including the name, place, date and time the message was posted.

Hudson and Bruckman (2004: 138) draw attention to being mindful when processing the sensitive information that the data might contain – namely, identifiers such as names or IP addresses as well as information related to sensitive topics, such as health issues or illegal activities – and the harm the study may cause if a subject is recognised or linked with the study. How long data is stored, who has access to it, whether the identifiers will be included in the analysis, whether they will be removed and when, are all questions to be considered by the researcher.

Beinhoff and Rasinger (2016: 579–581) draw attention to the tools of manipulation to gain access to desired information that the Internet environment may provide. Online profiles allow the constructing of identities incompatible with those offline or multiple identities. Especially in environments where membership is based on shared characteristics, a researcher who is a member may trick other users into revealing information that they would not share with an ‘outsider’. However, even with ‘sincere’ profiles, researchers may engage in the ‘commodification of rapport’ and ‘faking [of] friendships’:

Experienced fieldworkers, especially those working with qualitative methods such as interviews, are well versed in establishing a rapport with participants – a rapport that may seem personal to the participant, but may possibly be a mere, albeit valuable, skill for the researcher. (2016: 581)

Finally, as is repeatedly highlighted by Association of Internet Research (AoIR), it is important to remember that, due to the varied character and changeability of Internet environments, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all set of recommendations, and every study needs careful individual consideration. Therefore, AoIR advocate guidelines adaptable and responsive to diverse contexts rather than a code of practice (Markham and Buchanan, 2012: 5). To assess the ethical aspect of my study, I have used a decision-making protocol recommended by the AoIR website (Ess and AoIR, 2002: 18). Both the template and the completed copy can be found in the Appendix (pp. 339–343).

I

ONOMASTICS: THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

The main ongoing theoretical issue in the field of onomastics – to outline the current state of affairs in the field of name study – is the establishing of the theory of names, every now and then revisited by leading journals, e.g. *Names* 33.3 (1985), *Onoma* 41 (2006) and *Names* 58.2 (2010). As Nicolaisen (1985: 109) puts it: although there are plenty of ‘theories about names’, there is still no ‘Theory of Names’. A number of scholars have emphasised the need, even the urgency, for establishing one, e.g. Algeo (2010, 1985a), Zelinsky (2002: 243–245), Pamp (1985: 114), and expressed frustration about the ‘sorry state’ (Berezowski, 2001: 43) or ‘primitive level’ (Zelinsky, 2002: 243) of the debate. These concerns are understandable, as searching for rules and norms and developing theories is the nature of science in a wide sense.

Although there is no fully developed name theory, there are a number of theoretical questions to consider when undertaking an investigation into names. I have selected to focus on those that are particularly important in the process of developing the theory of names, to ensure that the work is relevant and constitutes a valuable contribution within the field of onomastics.

In general, as Zelinsky (2002: 244) recommends, a theory should be able ‘to explain the nature, origins, development, the essential meaning and larger import of the items at hand, and (...) to predict future patterns and outcomes’. Algeo (1985a) and Coates (2006a) present more detailed ‘checklists’ to be met by the theory. According to Algeo (1985a: 143–144), first, we need a clear definition and characterisation of a name as an object of onomastic enquiry. Then we need a descriptive framework to approach names that must include a taxonomy able to incorporate any class of names, taking into account their invention and use. The theory should facilitate both the synchronic and the diachronic study of names. Algeo also suggests that onomasticians should take a closer look at the distinction between the language system and the language in use (for example, Saussurean *langue/parole* and Chomskyan *competence/performance* dichotomies) and focus more on names as

elements of parole and performance. He postulates that: ‘As names are private and practical in their nature, the individual use of names may form an important part of the theory of onomastics.’ The theory of names should be distinct from other disciplines’ approaches but also needs to be capable of relating names to various aspects of human life framed by a unified theory of human behaviour. Finally, the theory should look for any possible universals of naming.

Coates (2006a: 7-8) asks twelve questions that he thinks the name theory should answer. They are formulated somewhat differently and are more specific, but as Coates himself notices, largely cover what Algeo proposed. However, Coates suggests that instead of separating itself from other disciplines, onomastics should benefit from its interdisciplinary nature and draw on the theoretical approaches of other academic branches. Blanár (2009: 97) highlights yet another aspect, pointing out that during the process of theoretical development, the new approaches should not dismiss the knowledge gained so far. He has observed that the pragmatic-communicational approach that has recently emerged in onomastics seems to be developing as a parallel stream, ignoring the work accomplished to date. Such an attitude he finds unacceptable: the new developments should accommodate and ‘supersede by constructive criticism’ the existing ones rather than divert from them.

In summary, the first step in investigating names is standardisation and uniformisation of terminology, definitions and tools to organise the data, such as, as suggested by Zelinsky (2002: 252), a classification system that could be applied to all types of names.

1. Terminology and definition of names

In any academic field, uniform terminology and clear definitions are crucial for researchers to systemise their findings in order to abstract universal trends. In onomastics, a lack of universally accepted terminology and definitions creates difficulties in cooperation between different scholars and schools, which may affect the success of a prospective theory. This also applies to any new phenomenon that is related to the particular field and is potentially important. As Zelinsky (2002: 252) highlights, it is imperative to fill the gaps by focusing on groups of names that have

been so far explored poorly or not at all, and over as many places and time periods as possible. Usernames are certainly one of these groups that need attention, as they cannot be excluded from the theorising.

So far, there have been occasional attempts to establish terminology in specific languages or language groups, e.g. in French, German and English (Eichler et al., 1995-96); English (Room, 1996); and Russian (Podol'skaia, 1978). Since 2005, an international commission of ICOS has been working on onomastic dictionary, in English, German and French to begin with (Harvalik, 2007: 9). Some frequently met terms are explained on ICOS's web site.⁴ However, in many cases what ICOS is proposing at the moment, are very basic explanations. For example, a name is defined as follows:

proper name – linguistic expression that uniquely identifies a person, a group of persons, a place, an animal or an object (ship, train...) – e.g. Earth, Zambezi, Chile, Beijing, David, Victoria, Miikkulainen, Hyundai, Sony, Das Erzgebirge

This looks like a provisional definition not designed for academic purposes. Zelinsky (2002: 245) is right to state that:

Although the person on the street may get along quite nicely with the OED definition, 'The particular combination of sounds employed as the individual designation of a single person, animal, place, or thing,' it is wholly inadequate for the demanding scholar.

On the other hand, a number of definitions have been proposed by scholars. However, none of them has been accepted as universally applicable. The following examples illustrate what aspects of names suggested definitions might cover.

Pamp (1985: 111) proposes a definition that refers to a general nature of names: that it is a word or behaves as such, i.e. if it contains two or more words, it is still to be treated as one linguistic unit, and, as such, it has a form and a content:

A proper name is a linguistic sign, normally consisting of a word but sometimes of a syntagm, the use of which is so conventionalized that it functions as a word. If you accept the Saussurean dichotomy, this means that

⁴ <http://www.icosweb.net/index.php/terminology.html>

a name is a Janus head equipped with two faces: the external form – a sequence of phonemes or graphemes – and the internal contents – a set of semantic features.

Pulgram (1954: 49) offers a more detailed definition:

A proper name is a noun used in a non-universal function, with or without recognizable current lexical value, of which the potential meaning coincides with and never exceeds its actual meaning, and which is attached as a label to one animate being or one inanimate object (or to more than one in the case of collective names) for the purpose of specific distinction from among a number of like or in some respects similar beings or objects that are either in no manner distinguished from one another or, for our interest, not sufficiently distinguished.

This definition refers to the aspects of names that are still under discussion: the grammatical status of names, their meaning and their function, which gives opportunity for participation in the debate. First, there is no agreement regarding the grammatical status of names. A group of grammarians see common nouns and proper names as a uniform group where a clear distinction is impossible to establish (e.g. Giering et al., 1980: 59; Jespersen, 1924: 69). Others state that names differ from nouns, but are still a subdivision of nouns (e.g. Van Langendonck, 2007). Yet another group of scholars argue that names differ too much from nouns to be identified with them, i.e. that they behave more like pronouns and noun phrases rather than nouns as part of a noun phrase (Montague, 1973), or that they seem to be best characterised as determinatives (noun modifiers that determine the referents of noun phrases) (Anderson, 2007).⁵

At present, there is also an ongoing debate on the meaning and function of names, delivering various viewpoints and contrasting opinions. As my study has a potential to contribute to this discussion, I am going to present an overview of the main concepts.⁶

⁵ For detailed analysis refer to Anderson (2007) which is fully dedicated to this topic.

⁶ For an in-depth account, see, e.g. García-Ramírez (2010), Coates (2006b) or Berezowski (2001).

1.1. The meaning of names

The earliest interest in the question of whether or not names have meaning⁷ developed amongst philosophers. Mill's *A System of Logic*, first published in 1843, might be considered to have initiated the debate. According to Mill and his followers, names, in essence, have no meaning: 'Proper names are not connotative: they denote the individuals who are called by them; but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals.' (1882: 40). In his much-cited example of the town named Dartmouth after its location 'at the mouth of the Dart', he argues that even if the Dart changed its course, the name would remain and the town would be correctly referred by this name⁸ (1882: 41). This means, that a *competent user*, namely, 'a speaker who is able to use a name successfully for the purposes at hand and according to the applicable standards', does not need to understand or know anything about a name; no kind of processing of the name is required (García-Ramírez, 2010: 13). The followers of the 'no-meaning' approaches include, amongst others, Coates (2006b, 2006c), Kripke (1980) and Donnellan (1970). Kripke (1980: 106), for example, proposed a 'causal theory' according to which, simply speaking, people are known as called by one or another name because their names are passed on between the persons who know them, while no qualities of the referent or the name contribute to establishing the link between them:

It is in general not the case that the reference of a name is determined by some unique properties satisfied by the referent and known or believed to be true of that referent by the speaker. (...) [T]he reference actually seems to be determined by the fact that the speaker is a member of a community of speakers who use the name. The name has been passed from link to link.

⁷ The understanding of the 'meaning' differs between the thinkers. In this work, the 'meaning of names', or as Anderson (2007: 132) calls it, the 'semantic status' of names, is understood as whether or not they convey descriptions or indicate properties of the named in their lexico-grammatical structure. On the one hand, it should be distinguished from etymology that indicates the origin of the name, and on the other, from their symbolic or sentimental, socio-cultural or personal, values.

⁸ As Anderson (2007: 136) rightly points out, this kind of opacity is not limited to names: some people still talk about *dialling a friend* or *giving somebody a bell*, although telephones no longer have a dial or make the sound of a bell.

It should, however, be mentioned that not all philosophical statements on the meaning of names are entirely rigorous. Strawson (1950: 338–341), for example, states that names have no descriptive meaning (which is why ‘men, dogs and motor-bicycles may be called “Horace”’). However, he admits the existence of ‘impure names’, ‘quasi-names’ or ‘embryonic names’, such as ‘the Round Table’, ‘the Glorious Revolution’ or ‘the Great War’, in which we can observe a clear relation between the object and its name, placed between ‘pure names’ with no meaning and common vocabulary.⁹

According to Peirce (as quoted in Pietarinen, 2010: 342), names might be perceived as informative upon the first encounter:

A proper name, when one meets with it for the first time, is existentially connected with some percept or other equivalent individual knowledge of the individual it names. It is then, and then only, a genuine Index. The next time one meets with it, one regards it as an Icon of that Index. The habitual acquaintance with it having been acquired, it becomes a Symbol whose Interpretant represents it as an Icon of an Index of the Individual named. [CP 2.329, 1903, *Speculative Grammar: Propositions*]

This approach, although it does not grant names with ‘genuine’ meaning, shows some consideration to the perspective of the language users¹⁰ as well as the fact that this might not be the same as that of the analyst.

Recently, some philosophers have tried to use evidence from other fields to support their views. For example, García-Ramírez (2010: 20–29) refers to studies in early lexical development, cognitive development and name retrieval to support his view that names have no meaning:

The evidence shows that competent understanding of names starts at about 6 months of age. However, the data shows that property assessment is not in the early repertoire of infants. It follows that competence for names does not require that the subject identifies objects by assessing their properties. This

⁹ It seems that if we agree that descriptive names are not fully developed names then we would have to reconsider the onomastic status of other classes of names, such as nicknames or descriptive given names.

¹⁰ Considering language users’ perspective on names in general, and not the sentiments of individual users towards particular names.

separation between object identification and property assessment is not simply eliminated through development. The data here show that even for adults, who have a greater linguistic and conceptual expertise, there is such a split. (2010: 20)

Thus, as argued by a cognitive psychologist Brennen (2000), personal names are processed as nonsense words. Evidence from cognitive and neuropsychological experiments has shown that names are much harder to recall than other characteristics of a given person, even when they are homonymous with common nouns, e.g. a word ‘gardener’ is easier to retrieve as a profession than as a surname derived from this noun. One of the proposed explanations was that this is because professions typically generate various associations, images or stereotypes, whereas surnames are not associated with any information about a category of people who bear a certain surname.

Brennen proposes that personal names may be processed for semantic meaning when heard for the first time, but less and less so at each subsequent exposure. He brings up an example of names that may have humorous associations, which is occasionally the case with foreign names, such as when English speaker encounters a Norwegian named Bent. According to Brennen (2000: 143), ‘the urge to smile at the holder of the name fades and after repeated exposures the name is no longer processed semantically.’ Brennen (2000: 144) also stresses that we need to distinguish between the meaning of names for their bearers (internal meaning), who might, for various reasons, be emotionally attached to them, and their meaning for others (external meaning), for whom the same names are merely labels that connote no meaning.

However, other studies in this field present different results. For example, Fogler and James (2007), as well as Brédart and Valentine (1998),¹¹ demonstrate that descriptive

¹¹ Interestingly, García-Ramírez (2010: 35) uses the same study of Brédart and Valentine (1998) to prove that names have no meaning. According to him, the researchers ‘show that names behave differently from terms that do carry descriptive information about the referred object’. In fact, Brédart and Valentine (1998: 199, 201, 205) do not write about ‘terms that carry descriptive information’, but about descriptive *names* (they never substituted ‘term’ for ‘name’), and not that they ‘behave differently’ but simply are easier to retrieve, which is clearly stated in the opening abstract at the very beginning of the article: ‘Results unequivocally showed that retrieval blocks occurred more often in naming characters bearing arbitrary names than in naming characters bearing descriptive names’ (1998: 199). Thus, here García-Ramírez (2010) has taken, in fact, the arbitrariness of names as a given rather than as an objective to prove and has dismissed non-arbitrary names as non-names.

names are easier to retrieve than non-descriptive ones. Namely, amongst pictures of well-known cartoon characters, those with descriptive names, such as the Pink Panther, Grumpy and Spider-Man, were easier to retrieve than those of characters with non-descriptive names, such as Homer Simpson, Aladdin and Mary Poppins. This shows that property assessment plays a role in the process of retrieval.

According to Coates (2006b: 356): ‘PROPER is best understood as a mode of reference contrasting with SEMANTIC reference.’ As he explains, names that are bestowed because of their sense, such as circumstance names, lose their meaning during the naming act (2006b: 368):

This is where it is crucial to distinguish the BESTOWAL of names from their USAGE. These linguistic objects were clearly bestowed in virtue of their meaning, that is, of their sense, but as in all such cases the act of bestowal is a formal cancellation of the meaning, that is, a license to use the expression in a different referential mode without the mediation of sense. This is a partner of Kripke’s contention (1980: 96–97) that ‘baptismal acts’ fix the referents of expressions once and for all. After bestowal, the expression, used to refer to a person, refers onymically, though the sense of its etymological source can be accessed for a variety of cultural reasons and purposes, and licenses a number of expectations. (...) BESTOWAL IS ONYMIZATION, by which I mean that it is understandable not just as a significant act in the life of the individual newly bearing the name, but it may also be a significant act in the ‘life’ of an expression: a formal suspension of whatever sense it may have, for the purpose of reference.

Adams (2009) and Enninger (1985), on the other hand, argue that the semantics of nicknames do not fade away or are revisited only on particular selected occasions. Nicknames take part in ongoing process of communicating, constructing and negotiating identities and relationships within a group, which is clearly related to their semantics, thus we can talk about ‘semantic reference’ here. These works also call Kripke’s theory into question. First, Amish by-names are ‘highly individualized’ names that render the named ‘hardly mistakable individualities’ (Enninger, 1985: 253–257), which shows a clear link between the name and its bearer that affects the usage of nicknames. Second, as Adams (2009: 85) indicates, it is socially unacceptable to call someone by their nickname only because others do so. Enninger (1985: 253–257) has also noticed that the usage of nicknames is restricted due to

their often derogatory character. Importantly, this shows that being able to refer correctly is not always the same as using the name correctly.

The studies of Adams (2009), Fogler and James (2007), Brédart and Valentine (1998), and Enninger (1985) thus suggest that both onymic and semantic reference do not contradict each other in the case of descriptive names. This is an important observation, as descriptive naming is widespread across the world, for example, two-thirds of Alford's (1987: 60) sampled societies, bestow semantically transparent names. The most popular sources for semantic content seem physical or behavioural characteristics of the named (in some communities, it is customary to wait until characteristics emerge), which makes these names directly descriptive.

Very likely, most of the names were originally semantically transparent¹² (Alford, 1987: 59). As Fogler and James (2007: 206) indicate: 'This was an efficient use of language, and our data indicate that it probably served as an effective mnemonic device, so that names were not particularly difficult to retrieve.' Thus, the kind of names that are typically used in experiments of language acquisition and psychology are not representative of what a name as a phenomenon is like in general.¹³

Some theorists have also started to notice the issues posed by the Eurocentric character of the enquiry into the nature of names. Mallon et al. (2009: 342) point out that 'some well-known semantic intuitions about proper names vary within and across cultures'. García-Ramírez (2010: 3) argues that he has addressed the concerns put forward by Mallon et al. (2009) by presenting evidence from lexical and cognitive development as well as neurophysiology, where intuitions do not play a

¹² Occasionally nowadays we may also find expressions of the 'need' in meaningful names. For example, vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006: 10) indicate that parents of stillborn children may choose such names as *Jonathan* 'precious gift to God' or *Erin* 'peace' precisely because of their literal meaning. Another example might be invented names that appeared in Russia in 1920s and 1930s to commemorate the October Revolution, such as various formations based on the name of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin: *Vilen* (m) and *Vilena* (f) 'V. I. Lenin', *Vladlen/-a* and *Vladilen/-a* 'Vladimir Lenin', *Vilora* 'V. I. L. – organiser of revolution', *Ninel'* – reversed 'Lenin' (Petrovskii, 1995: 76–79, 167).

¹³ For example, in Russia, where Christianity was introduced in the tenth century, descriptive names were still in use until the seventeenth century, including official documentation. Often people did not know one another's Christian names. Quite possibly, people found descriptive names more useful.

central role. He seems to be mistaken. Differences in epistemic intuitions between cultures were observed exactly in the same type of evidence as he brings up, namely, in cultural differences in cognitive processes, including perception, attention and memory (Mallon et al., 2009: 340). The evidence presented by García-Ramírez (2010: 22–34) does not have multicultural character, and thus fails to address concerns about inter-cultural differences. Additionally, García-Ramírez (2010: 12–13) writes that he has in mind ‘actual language use’ while the evidence brought up by him is experiment-based. Experimental settings do not reflect the context of the actual usage of language.

Some philosophers, on the other hand, postulate that names have meaning, i.e. they carry description associated with the referents. The descriptivist¹⁴ theories were initiated by Frege (1949) and Russell (2010 [1918]), who, in general, proposed that names function as abbreviations for descriptions of their bearers.

Since Frege and Russell, various types of descriptivism have developed. To compare, according to ‘cluster descriptivism’, not a single description, but any possible description (a cluster of descriptions) that the speaker associates with the named person, constitutes the meaning of this name (García-Ramírez, 2010: 14). Cluster descriptivism was proposed by Searle (1958: 172), most possibly based on Wittgenstein’s (1967: 36–37) remarks that a name could not possibly correspond with just one description as people can be described in many ways and it might not be clear which one is the right one. Searle (1958: 172–173) also proposed a re-definition of the relationship between the name and its meaning, namely, names do not function as descriptions, but as ‘pegs on which to hang descriptions’. Thus, names as such do not ‘describe or specify characteristics of objects’, but are ‘logically connected with characteristics of the object to which they refer’ in the way that they accumulate meanings in the course of their usage.

Yet another view is offered by the Boethian approach, represented, for example, by Plantinga: ‘proper names express essences, and different proper names of the same

¹⁴ According to García-Ramírez (2010: 13, 17), there are seven different descriptivist approaches that form three groups, basic, semantic and expanded, but it is not necessary to treat them separately here.

object can express different and epistemically inequivalent essences’ (1978: 138). An essence is, according to Plantinga (1978: 132), ‘a property [that one] has essentially’ that is ‘incommunicable to any other’, meaning that no other entity may share this property.

The postulation of the descriptivist approaches is that a competent speaker needs to be able to process the name in one or another way. They must either understand the description corresponding with the name, or be able to recognise its referent as satisfying the relevant description – or both, in the case of Plantinga’s Boethian descriptivism (García-Ramírez, 2010: 11–15; Berezowski, 2001: 29–32).

The viewpoint that names are not just arbitrary labels¹⁵ finds its confirmation in fieldwork research of ethnographic and anthropologic character that reports the existence of meaningful names that carry readily accessible information about their bearers. For instance, nicknames and other by-names are classes of anthroponyms that are often descriptive and provide retrievable information about the named person. Some of the examples of ‘descriptive and evaluative’ Amish by-names are listed by Enninger (1985: 250-257): *Dutch* (because of his ‘Dutch’ accent), *Fuzzy/Curly John*, *Grumpy Aaron*, *Sloppy Steve* and other. Mashiri (2004) presents Shona nicknames that are informative. Given names might be descriptive, too. For example, among the Akan of Ghana ‘each person has an automatic birthday first name that points to the day of the week that s/he was born’. As Agyekum (2006: 212) explains, his first name *Kofi* indicates Friday as it is the day on which he was born. Another example are names indicating birth order ‘that morphologically correspond with the Akan numerals’, e.g. 2nd – *Manu*, 3rd – *Mensa* (m) and *Mansa* (f), 4th – *Annan / Anane*, etc (Agyekum, 2006: 220).

The sense of the name might also be carried less literally. Some kinds of Akan names are customarily given in specific situations, such as circumstances during the

¹⁵ It might be indicative that names without transparent semantics are not perceived as completely meaningless labels, either. For example, they tend to generate associations with such qualities as activity/passivity, femininity/masculinity, attractiveness, morality, popularity and cheerfulness (Macrae et al., 2002; Whissell, 2001; Mehrabian, 1997).

pregnancy and childbirth. For example, parents who struggled for children may name their child *Nyamekye* ‘God’s gift’ or *Nyameama* ‘God has given’. Other names may reflect conflicts within the family or with neighbours, such as: *Ammamanye* ‘they did not allow me to perform it’, *Fasaayeme* ‘treat me like that’ or *Yekekanokwa* ‘they are saying it in vain’ (Agyekum, 2006: 222–224). If a child is born after some unfortunate event, it might be named in reference to this, such as *Omoremilekun* ‘The baby stopped me from crying’, or when the family is particularly satisfied with their economic situation, they may also commemorate it with the child’s name, e.g. *Owolabi* ‘We have given birth to “money”’ and *Ajewole* ‘Riches have been bestowed on this house’ (Akinaso, 1981: 47–56). These names are comprehensible to competent speakers. The general feature of Akan naming is that names frequently characterise the named, which is why it is also common to acquire new names, by-names and other appellations related to personal achievements (Agyekum, 2006: 209).

Old Slavonic names were also descriptive and included names indicating birth order (*Первой, Первуша* ‘first’, *Второй, Вторак* ‘second’, *Третий, Третьяк* ‘third’, and so on), parents’ feelings (*Жьдань* ‘awaited’, *Любимь* ‘loved, beloved’, *Бажен* ‘desired very much’), characteristics of the child (*Улыба* ‘smiling’, *Молчан* ‘quiet’, *Безсон* ‘sleepless’) and time or circumstances of birth (*Мороз* ‘frost’, *Гроза* ‘storm’, *Суббота* ‘Saturday’, *Вечер* ‘evening’, *Посник* ‘fasting’) (Petrovskii, 1995: 63, 100, 114, 145; Superanskaia and Suslova, 1981: 30–37; Miroslavskaja, 1980: 203–213; Chichagov, 1959: 30; Tupikov, 1903: 4–10). Other types of semantically transparent but not directly descriptive were protective derogatory names (*Неудача* ‘failure’, *Некрас* ‘ugly’, *Лишний* ‘needless’, *Нелюба* ‘not loved’) and names with two roots that were characteristic of upper social classes and reflected, on the other hand, ambitions and expectations, e.g. *Всеволод* ‘every + rule’, *Володимѣрь* ‘rule + world’, *Любомир* ‘love + world, peace’ (Sal’mon, 2002: 34; Petrovskii, 1995: 10–11, 79–80, 145; Tupikov, 1903: 5).

To summarise, the examination of names across cultures seems to contradict Mill’s (1882: 40) account that names only denote and do not connote, and confirms the descriptivist view that competent speakers understand the meaning of their names. The inquiry into the meaning of names highlighted some important issues to consider

in the following parts of the enquiry. First, the meaning might have to do with etymological transparency, but not only this. There are etymologically transparent names that are not perceived as descriptive of the named, such Hope, Rose, Prudence, Baker or Potter. Thus, the existence of etymologically transparent names does not prove their meaningfulness. It might be about our expectations, or, as Mallon et al. (2009) say, intuitions about the nature of names, including whether or not they should be informative. Akinnaso (1981: 37) might be right, saying, that:

Received notions about the arbitrariness of personal names are based on the cultural attitude that personal names, as labels, are not supposed to have semantic content – i.e., the encoding of retrievable information in their lexico-grammatical structure. This attitude roughly typifies the European conception of the semantico-cultural significance of personal names and contrasts with widely held views about the subject in several other parts of the world, especially Africa, Asia, Oceania, and aboriginal North America.¹⁶

Therefore, the names that we expect to be informative are likely to have actual meaning. However, the literature to date does not provide sufficient evidence from the ‘actual language use’ to demonstrate how the meaningfulness of descriptive names may manifest itself. Hence, we need a method to observe the actual process of using names, preferably in natural rather than experimental settings.

1.2. The functions of names

Another element, next to the meaning, that constitutes a potential factor defining the name is its function. The function of names might be related to their semantics, but it goes beyond it; as vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006: 6) state: ‘More often than not (...) the power of names lies not in their linguistic meaning, but in the name itself. To understand what names mean, we must get beyond the debate itself, asking what they are as well as what they signify.’ Thus, we can say that the function of names involves social and cultural meanings that names may have.

Most scholars seem convinced that the primary role of names is to identify and distinguish individual objects, to refer to them, e.g. Anderson (2007: 100–107) and

¹⁶ Quite possibly, originally, names in all cultures were created to carry certain information; this habit may have found its continuation in nicknames.

Van Langendonck (2007: 11), and, in the case of living beings, to address them (a vocative function), which might be considered a distinct activity (Van Langendonck, 2007: 191):

Pragmatically, we can distinguish between call-names and identificatory names. Call-names will often be first names, only sometimes by-names or family names used individually. The last two are used mainly to identify.¹⁷

According to Mill, names serve purely as terms of reference: ‘When we name a child by the name Paul, or a dog by the name Cæsar, these names are simply marks used to enable those individuals to be made subjects of discourse.’ (1882: 20). Thus, names serve to distinguish individuals and in this way facilitate referring to them.

Nikonov (1974: 12-13), on the other hand, rejects the opinion that the primary role of names is to identify and distinguish individual entities. He argues that general repetitiveness as well as a tendency towards frequent usage of the same names within communities and families, which makes the naming system an ineffective means of precise identification, contradicts this widespread belief. Alford (1987: 68–69) in his cross-cultural analysis of naming patterns, also reports that too many naming systems worldwide are inefficient in distinguishing individuals for this to be the central function of names.

There are examples in both contemporary and historical data to support this idea. Nikonov (1974: 12) mentions that when he was conducting his research there were around 90,000 people in Moscow whose surname was Ivanov and about 1,000 of these were named Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov. Examples of communities where inhabitants share a small number of given names and surnames can be found worldwide (Anderson, 2007: 101). In contemporary China there exist some 3,000 surnames, but fewer than 300 are commonly used: 87% of the Chinese use one of the 100 most popular of them, and 56% of the population use one from the top nineteen (Kałużyńska, 2004: 82). In America, a number of studies revealed a tendency to name children, especially boys, after relatives. In Alford’s (1987: 131–139) sample,

¹⁷ I would not agree with this statement. By-names, for example school nicknames, are often used as what Van Langendonck refers to as call-names whereas given names are components of an official personal name required for official identification.

male offspring were given a name (either first or middle) after relatives (especially after a father and especially in upper social classes¹⁸) 67% of the time, with the first-born sons as much as 80% of the time. In many Islamic societies most of the people share a small number of religious names, especially Muhammad and Fatima (Alford, 1987: 68). Similarly, in the Scottish Highlands many people share both given and family names; for example, in the village of Embo, there were once thirteen William Mackays at school, whom teachers called Willie A, Willie B, Willie C, and so on (Dorian, 1970: 313).

In historical Russia, 16–25% of the male population in the countryside was named Ivan, meaning that every fifth or fourth man was called Ivan. This name was commonly shared even amongst the family members of the same generation, as in one of examples presented by Nikonov (from the town of Yaroslavl in 1646): (...) *там же у Первушки Тихонова дети «Ивашко, да Ивашко ж, да Ивашко, да Ивашко ж»*, ‘(...) and there is Pervushka Tikhonov with his children “Ivashko, and Ivashko, and then Ivashko, and Ivashko”.’ Jan Długosz, a Polish medieval chronicler, had ten brothers – all of them named Jan; apparently, it was seen as a lucky name (Nikonov, 1974: 12). Carlsson (1989: 13) presents examples of two small (unnamed) villages in Suffolk in 1327: ‘Out of taxable population of 51 individuals living there, 19 were called John and 12 William’.¹⁹

On the other hand, not all individuals ever had, or used, names – yet they managed to function without them. In some historical societies, women were not given individual personal names and were referred to by indicators of familial relationships or role, e.g. in Rome and Korea, but it is not known how many naming systems functioned this way. A similar custom of reference was recorded in Russian documents from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, e.g. *Полюжая* [*poliuzhaia*] ‘belonging to *Poliud*’, and *Завижная* [*zavizhaia*] ‘belonging to *Zavid*’. In official documents, females were also rarely registered under their own personal names but typically by

¹⁸ Also depending on the profession, e.g. 77% of lawyers named their firstborn sons after themselves, while only 23% of teachers did so (Alford, 1987: 137).

¹⁹ Although it should be noted that the ‘taxable population’ would only have been a fraction of the total population. John and William were probably seen as prestige names in this community.

father's or husband's name instead. Some manifestation of such an attitude might be observed in English-speaking countries when a married woman is referred to as 'Mrs *Husband's Name*' (Van Langendonck, 2007: 81, 143; Nikonov, 1974: 21, 25; Tupikov, 1903: 27–28).

According to Nikonov (1974: 19–27), names – or a lack thereof – are, first of all, to mark individuals' positions in the socio-economic system. Observation of the development and transformations within ever-changing naming systems, which reflect socio-economical changes, such as the process of expansion of family names across Europe, may serve as evidence to support this statement (Nikonov, 1974: 41). Indeed, family names do not seem to have appeared to 'serve to support differentiation', as Anderson (2007: 102) puts it, because then the least numerous (the richest) spheres would not have adopted them first. Quite the opposite, they were not to distinguish between people with the same given names, but to mark those belonging together to indicate authorised inheritors of wealth, and much later in many countries became a legal requirement for everybody. In terms of geographical distribution, family names appeared in the most developed regions first, too (Nikonov, 1974: 179–186). In general, many naming systems seem organised to highlight similarities rather than differences (Alford, 1987: 69).

Nowadays, we might just also be observing how social changes are reflected in the alteration in naming patterns. In Europe, the institution of the family has recently undergone major changes, indicated, for example, by Bertram (2004), one of the leading specialists in family research, who has noticed that the traditional structure of the family in industrial societies is transforming into the 'negotiating family'. In these circumstances the term 'family name' also seems to gradually lose its relevance. As Zgusta (1998: 193) puts it: '(...) there are families in which the spouses have different last names, with children collected in the course of various preceding marriages and divorces.'

Apart from 'simple' indication of social or familial relationships, names play a variety of other roles, in a culturally specific, sometimes very sophisticated, way. The diary-keeping function of personal names seems common in non-literate societies, e.g. with the Maharashtra of India, the Igbo and Ibibio of Nigeria, the

Kinyarwanda of Rwanda, the Basotho of Lesotho, and the Nyoro and Lugbara of East Africa, where ‘the storage and transmission of information is mainly through the oral medium’ (Akinnaso, 1981: 58). Akinnaso (1981: 57–58) gives the example of an informant who used his daughter’s name, *Omokolade* ‘child brings wealth’, to reconstruct events from twenty years ago, when the price of cocoa, an important Yorùbá crop, increased significantly. On a more general level, these names might be described as ‘a reminder of dominant social values, important personal concerns, and memorable events’ (Akinnaso, 1981: 58–60). Another common naming custom are derogatory protective names: their role is to present the child as worthless to evil spirits to discourage their interest, e.g. Moselantja ‘dog’s tail’, Nthofeela ‘just-a-thing’ (Basoto) and Punjā ‘heap of dirt’ (in Maharashtrian society) (Akinnaso, 1981: 59; Nikonov, 1974: 29–30).

The social significance of names is also experienced at the individual level. Transitions between life stages and social roles, especially those perceived as particularly important, are often marked by naming strategies. In some societies, an official name change or acquisition might be implemented. For example, in Japanese tradition, the ‘rites of the life cycle’, from birth to burial (when a buried person also receives a new name), are marked by name change or acquisition of professional pseudonyms (Frolova, 2008). Sometimes this causes the accumulation of a variety of names, each of them used in different social context. For example, the Maroons in Guyana use various names depending on the situation: ‘great names’ in infancy, ‘play names’ with peers, ‘bad names’ with joking partners, ‘song names’ as romantic nicknames, Western pseudonyms at work outside the village and surnames for dealing with the government. In Europe, few changes are marked by official name change (e.g. marriage or adoption); still, by convention, life stages and social roles might be indicated by using different forms of names (e.g. full personal name, given name in full, shortened or diminutive form). In other situations, names might be avoided altogether, e.g. in favour of kinship terms or honorifics. In addition, some communities may develop their own alternative naming (or nicknaming) systems, e.g. among monks or criminals (Griffin, 2010: 373–379; Anderson, 2007: 101–104; Sal’mon 2002: 32–35; Potter, 1999: 157; Holland 1990: 255–269; Alford, 1987: 58;

Rees and Noble 1985: x, 62–63, 86–87; Nikonov, 1974: 21–25). If names were simply to identify and distinguish, we would not need so many varieties of names:

If names were just arbitrary labels, and if singular definite reference and address were their only functions, the arbitrary assignment of arbitrary combinations of arbitrary letters or numbers would not only suffice, but would be ideal. (Enninger, 1985: 249)

In reality, such a naming system might not seem ideal for its users. The Balinese are given arbitrarily coined nonsense syllables as their personal names and carefully avoid their duplication, at least in a single community. However, these optimally efficient identifiers are hardly ever used in everyday life – they are the least used of all sorts of appellations that can be applied to a Balinese person, which, apart from personal names, include birth order names, kinship terms, teknonyms, status titles and public titles (Geertz, 1973: 368–370). Apparently, the socio-cultural capacity of reference and address terms is found more important than their identifying capacity. In general, unique, stable names (those kept throughout life) tend not to be used in everyday communication in favour of kin terms; they tend to be avoided or tabooed as too intimate or too exposing of their bearers (Anderson, 2007: 102; Alford, 1987: 72–73; Akinnaso, 1981: 40–41).

Identification is thus just one of the many functions that names may fulfil. In addition, the notion of identification itself should probably be understood not only in terms of distinguishing individual entities from one another. As Alford (1987: 69) aptly notices, the function of identification manifests itself in two aspects: differentiation and categorisation. Finch (2008: 711) has also observed these two aspects of naming: ‘Individuality and connectedness, the two dimensions of a name.’

In summary, we can agree with Agyekum (2006: 231) that naming is a ‘marker of the people’s belief, ideology, religion, culture, philosophy and thought’, that is, as Akinnaso (1981: 63) states, ‘historically constructed, socially maintained, and based on shared assumptions and expectations of a particular community’. The general role of names can be articulated after vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006: 5): ‘naming expresses as well as constitutes social relations’. Naming is a universal phenomenon whose patterns and functions seem to have much in common globally – as pointed

out by Akinnaso (1981: 63): ‘among populations that are neither historically nor linguistically related, personal names are based on some systematic cultural principles whose application is fairly predictable.’ On the other hand, naming is also embedded in a specific historical and socio-cultural context. Thus, a competent user, apart from understanding the semantic content of the name, should also share knowledge about the relevant aspects of the context with other members of the relevant community.

In any case, it is the language speakers who operate the names, it is also them, who determine the function and allocate the meanings to their linguistic tools. Therefore, to observe how names are handled by competent speakers ‘for the purposes at hand and according to the applicable standards’, it seems to make more sense to focus on the perspective of these speakers rather than try to make the names fit one’s own ideas about what they should be.

1.3. Classification of names

Zelinsky (2002: 243) has proposed that a classification of the ‘entire universe of names’ would be an important element of the common ground for establishing the theory of names. A comprehensive, standardised classification is needed to facilitate cross-analysis among cultures, historical periods and various name-types; this would help to generate theoretical questions. The list of onomastic classes is open, which is why it is important that the classification is able to accommodate any new class that could potentially be discovered. Before Zelinsky, there had been apparently only two attempts to include all existing types of names into classification: one undertaken by Stewart and Pulgram (1971: 1157) which included ten classes; and another, proposed by Nuessel (1992) twenty years later, which contained seventeen classes. In his project entitled ‘A Preliminary Typology of Names’, Zelinsky (2002: 253–258) has included over 130 classes of names, many of which were omitted before, such as cemeteries, playgrounds, prisons and fountains.

1.3.1. Usernames in the classification

As usernames are names for persons, they should be grouped as belonging to the class of anthroponyms. To illustrate the section of classification dedicated to anthroponyms, I will use the example of Zelinsky (2002: 253). He has called this class ‘Human Beings’ and divided it into eight subclasses:

1. Official or customary names
2. Nicknames
3. Pseudonyms, stage names, noms de plume, aliases
4. Fictional characters
5. Saints
6. Persons in religious order
7. Quasi-humans, e.g. dolls
8. [Numbers assigned to prison inmates, members of the military, or ordinary citizens, as in Social Security numbers]²⁰

Usernames are not mentioned in this classification, and it is not clear if they were meant to be included under one of the listed classes, such as nicknames, or along with pseudonyms, stage names, noms de plume and aliases.

Van Langendonck (2007: 189), who has dedicated some attention to usernames, was arguably the first to include them explicitly in the classification. His classification divides anthroponyms according to two parameters: *primary* versus *secondary* (both functionally and chronologically), and *official* versus *unofficial*, as follows:

1. Primary official personal names (first names – including derivations – and family names)
2. Secondary official personal names (family names employed as individual names, as in: ‘Johnson was a former president’, or pluralised, as in: ‘the Johnsons’, official identificatory epithets, e.g. ‘the Fifth’ in ‘Charles the Fifth’, and the number names, e.g. ‘007’ for ‘James Bond’)

²⁰ ‘Bracketed items are those whose status as proper names is debatable.’ (Zelinsky, 2002: 258)

3. Unofficial personal names:

- a) given by other people (by-names)
- b) names that one gives to oneself (pseudonyms and Internet chat names)

Username (in fact, the term ‘Internet chat name’ suggests only usernames that appear in chat rooms) have been considered unofficial names that involve a self-naming act. However, I would question the place that usernames have been given because the criteria used by the author are not universally applicable, which makes the whole classification seem to lack precision. First, it is not clear what Van Langendonck means by ‘chronologically’. His explanations regarding first and family names suggest it is the lifespan of a particular individual:

Chronologically, first names are generally used first, i.e. before other names. The fact that in most countries family names are even established before the child’s birth (...) does not matter here: the family name is not actually used before the first name. In addition, the family name is not an individual name by definition, hence hardly compares to the individual forename.’ (Van Langendonck, 2007: 190)

In relation to by-names, however, Van Langendonck refers to a historical perspective:

It is generally believed that at the very beginning of name-giving, anthroponymic systems did not contain by-names. This is quite plausible if we set out from the idea that by-names are secondary with regard to other names. (2007: 193)

Nevertheless, it is possible to find examples for both cases to prove otherwise. Historically, bynames are primary in relation to surnames. Surnames or family names not only appeared after the by-names did, but also frequently originated from them. In the case of a single lifespan, it is not clear in what way family names ‘are not actually used before the first names’: to address the child, to refer to it, in documents, in some other context, or in general. It is also unclear how the author knows what names are ‘actually used’ first; often various appellations – a given name, a number of endearing terms, a nickname, or a surname – seem to be used simultaneously, and it is difficult to assess which of them was ‘actually’ used first. There are also many places where late naming is applied as a rule and children are known by various

types of nicknames before receiving their ‘real’ names. For example, in Mongolia a child is not given a ‘real’ name until the hair-cutting ritual at the age of three to five, while Yakima Indians usually wait six months to twelve years to recognise which deceased relative is reincarnated in the child. Also, in cultures where re-naming acts take place, some given names are chronologically secondary to other given names as well as to other types of names (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2006: 104; Kałużyńska, 2004: 82; Akinnaso 1981: 39–42). Moreover, the way of dividing official and unofficial names that supposedly ‘contrast’ with each other (Van Langendonck, 2007: 192) also looks like a simplification. A single given name in many countries is used exclusively in unofficial settings, and may take various informal forms. The Internet serves for both unofficial and official communication and usernames are required for both varieties; in addition, it is not uncommon to utilise one’s legal name as a username. Pseudonyms are professional names that officially represent the named person in the field of their activity. They may also get into private life and, sometimes, replace the previous name completely – with or without following the legal changing procedure. As Ashley (1998: 299) puts it: ‘In law and in life, at what point does an assumed name become a “real name”? Something to ponder.’ Thus, I find both Van Langendonck’s criteria of classification and the place ascribed to usernames in this classification unconvincing.

Anthroponyms, in general, are arguably the most diversified onomastic subdivision, and therefore their standardisation is difficult. Naming systems differ from one country or culture to another and we are not sure to what extent we can talk about equivalency between national naming systems. Surnames, for example, can be inherited from a father (as in the majority of European traditions), a mother (as in some matrilineal cultures), from both parents (as in Spain and Latin America), or not inherited at all (as in some Indonesian communities, where every member of a family has their own personal names).²¹ They can be changed by a wife or a husband upon getting married, or remain unchanged (Kriukov, 1986: 90, 140, 179, 347). Icelanders

²¹ The naming system in Indonesia is complex; for a description see, for example, Kriukov (1986: 128–133).

do not use surnames but patronyms, and some Indonesians have one-component names (Kriukov, 1986: 80; Nikonov, 1988: 186).

In addition, naming systems change constantly, although not always noticeably in a generation. The changes might be to the structure of the naming systems (for example, the development of family names), to the role of certain anthroponomastic groups (for example, in the past nicknames were used in official documentation), as well as to the relations between them (for example, numerous family names originated from nicknames in the past, whereas current nicknames may originate from family names).²² Nikonov (1974: 42) points that anthroponyms are difficult to define and classify because this would require knowledge about the process of their development, which might be the source and the explanation of ambiguities and inconsistencies on local, national and international levels. He even states that it is in fact pointless to try to establish terminology and definition that are of spatially or temporally universal character.

Understandably, this situation causes confusion, making it difficult to determine a common ground for research. As a result, in many cases having to rely on their intuition and common sense, researchers often apply the same terms to different phenomena, or inversely. For example, Enninger (1985: 244) points at ‘indiscriminate application of the term “nickname” to quite diverse onomastic items in the extant literature’ including non-legal names, short or diminutive forms of first names, middle initials, or even ministerial titles. All these phenomena differ in terms of both origins and usage. According to Enninger (1985: 244–247), even when we have left out forms of first names and middle initials as components of official personal names and titles as non-onomastic phenomena, the remaining group of anthroponyms is still non-homogeneous and should be called ‘by-names’ rather than ‘nicknames’. He also urges researchers to offer, at least, working definitions of the phenomena they present in their papers.

²² For more information on world’s naming systems, see, for example, vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006), Kriukov (1986) and Nikonov (1974: 22, 32–42).

Some researchers do try to function adequately without precise terminology by doing exactly this: specifying what they understand by the term they are using in the particular work. For example, Butkus (1999: 125) in the article on Lithuanian nicknames explains:

I use the term nickname in the sense ‘an additional, unofficial name which refers to some characteristic of the person nicknamed and is used for purposes of identification.’ Any additional meaning a nickname may have is irrelevant to this purpose, since it is not an inherent feature of a nickname.

These kinds of problems are familiar to onomasticians working with anthroponyms in various languages. Gorbanevskii (1987: 100) relates the term *прозвище* ‘nickname’, only to a narrow group of jocular names for persons, whereas a wider meaning he ascribes to the term *кличка* ‘call-name’. According to Danilina (1979: 290), on the other hand, *прозвище* can be applied to both people and objects.

This tendency can also be observed in historical anthroponomastics. Disagreement on the pre-Christian names used in Russia in the tenth to the seventeenth centuries can serve as a good illustration. After Christianity had been introduced in the tenth century, the previously used non-Christian names were removed from the official naming system. However, in practice, they were still used, alongside the newly introduced Christian names, in official circulation: they appear in legal documentation, inventories and even in Church records²³ (Miroslavskaia, 1980: 202–213; Nikonov, 1974: 40; Chichagov, 1959: 11–28; Tupikov, 1903: 8). This situation has led to controversy over their status, namely, whether they should be considered regular personal names or just nicknames. Tupikov (1903: 8–21), for example, states that both pre-Christian and new Christian names played similar role and ought to be treated as equally legitimate means of official naming, whereas according to Chichagov (1959: 13–18), evidence presented by Tupikov cannot be taken as a confirmation of the equal status of pre-Christian and Christian names. He argues that after the old-Slavic names had been removed from the official naming system, their status automatically changed into that of nicknames (1959: 25–26). Miroslavskaia

²³ Interestingly, the ‘heathen names’ were also used by the clergy (Nikonov, 1974: 40; Tupikov, 1903: 16–17).

(1980: 203), on the other hand, having observed various structural models of personal names recorded in documents, proposes that certain types of pre-Christian names functioned as official names while other worked as nicknames. This disagreement might be, at least to some extent, due to the authors' interpretations of the terms (official) name and nickname and the relationships between them (Miroslavskaia, 1980: 202–205; Chichagov, 1959: 5–28; Tupikov, 1903: 4–16).

Internationally too, scholarship has no universally accepted terms. Zgusta (1998: 196) presents an example of discrepancies in the understanding of terms 'anthroponym' and 'personal name':

While all Slavic languages distinguish an 'anthroponym' as a name for persons²⁴ (John, Mary, Smith)²⁵ from a 'personal name' as the name of a single, individual person (Leonardo Bloomfield), there is no distinction between these two notions in German, so that either term can be used in both cases.

He highlights the usefulness of uniform terminology and, on the other hand, rightly reminds us that it should be of bearable complexity to be utilised successfully.

1.4. Usernames: terminology

Anthroponyms on the Internet have been referred to as *nicknames* (Swennen, 2001; Bays, 1998; Bechar-Israeli, 1995), *Internet pseudonyms* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003), *nick*, *Internet chat name* (Van Langendonck, 2007), or *irconim* (Rutkiewicz, 1999: 117). The terminology used so far might be misleading by suggesting an unverified kinship with other classes of names, or include only a narrow group of names, for example, a *chat name* only applies to names used in the chat rooms, while *irconym* (irc+onym) – to names used on IRC (Internet Relay Chat).

²⁴ 'A name for persons' in the sense of a name typically used for human beings (and not animals or inanimate objects) without having in mind any specific individual.

²⁵ Although the examples given by the author are formally adequate, Slavonic names would be a better illustration, e.g. Александр [aleksandr] and Agnieszka for anthroponyms, and Владимир Андреевич Никонов [vladimir andrejevich nikonov] and Adam Mickiewicz for personal names.

I have selected *username* as my working term, because it is quite widely known, and, in contrast to such terms as *nickname* or *pseudonym*, has not been allocated to designate other names than those used online; but I am not putting it forward as the only suitable term.

The next step in the present study is to describe usernames as an onomastic class. I am going to do this by comparing usernames with three other anthroponomastic classes: pseudonyms, nicknames and given names. I have selected these classes to frame usernames as a class because they, like usernames, are typically individually ascribed: they are not inherited or kinship-based (such as, for example, surnames, patronyms and teknonyms). My inquiry will be based on the existing literature, and will involve determining similarities and differences between usernames and the classes mentioned. This might help to establish a possible place of usernames amongst other anthroponomastic classes, either close enough to be identified with one of these classes, or perhaps leaning towards a new class.

2. Usernames as an onomastic class

2.1. Are usernames just other pseudonyms?²⁶

Pseudonyms deserve being researched as one of the important indicators of creative lives at all times in all nations (Podsevatkin, 1999: 3)

According to Podsevatkin (1999: 3) pseudonyms (from the Greek ‘pseudonimos’ - bearing an invented name) lend themselves to interdisciplinary study. A discipline related to pseudonyms, which he would name pseudonomastics, would be equally close to bibliography, linguistics and literary studies: linguists would explain methods of creating pseudonyms and their etymologies, literary scholars would analyse their origins and motivations, and bibliographers would trace their holders and compile dictionaries. Sal’mon (2002: 43) complements this view: ‘the question of pseudonyms relates to the theory of literature, aesthetic canons, questions of

²⁶ Examples of usernames used in this chapter come from Van Langendonck (2007: 301-305), Sidorova (2006: 92-97), Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003), Scheidt (2001) and Swennen (2001: 97-136).

politics and censorship'. Would then *pseudonomastics*, if it existed, cover the study of usernames?

The term *pseudonym* might be defined as an onomastic or literary term. Examples of onomastic definitions are: 'a fictitious name of a person usually used by artists, politicians etc. as an alternative to their legal name' (ICOS, 2011) and 'a made-up name used by individuals or groups in public or social life alongside or instead of real names' (Podol'skaia, 1978: 118). As a literary term, pseudonyms are described as 'different from real names' rather than 'fictitious' or 'made-up'. Some authors narrow the class to signatures in the form of standard names while writing signed by common appellations (e.g. *a lady*) or initials is considered anonymous. Other classes, such as Hellenised and Latinised names, maiden names, fake names of publishers or devotional names, might be included, excluded or classed as *quasipseudonyms* (Świerczyńska, 1983: 39-40, 286-287; Masanov, 1969: 285, 316).

Scholarly interest in *anonyma* and *pseudonyma* began in the Renaissance. As Golomidova (2005: 18) observes, pseudonyms are markers of authorship and are related to the issue of copyrights; the phenomenon of pseudonyms historically developed along with the concept of copyrights. They were first perceived as closely related, and therefore typically discussed together with other phenomena, causing authorship-related confusion: *pseudepigrapha*, homonyms, plagiarism, and Latinised and Hellenised names. Studies of figures with the same names (homonyms), which in Europe were the first works related to name ambiguities, appeared in antiquity in order to differentiate between these names. The issue of *pseudepigrapha*, the spurious writings of forged or falsely ascribed authorship, occurred when the earliest Christian Bible canon was formulated. The study of *pseudepigrapha* pointed the way for students of *anonyma* and *pseudonyma*, with the early scholars having devised critical methods for determining the authorship and authenticity. *Pseudepigraphy* and *pseudonymity* were considered identical until the eighteenth century. The first substitute names that gained scholarly attention were Latinised and Hellenised names widely used in the Renaissance as a reflection of fascination in classical antiquity. The first bibliographers of *anonyma* and *pseudonyma* were theologians, philologists, students of literature and philosophy, and lawyers.

Research into pseudonyms typically focuses on people who are recognisable; it often involves matching the fake names with the real ones and organising them into encyclopaedias and dictionaries. This may relate to national or international material, or a particular period or subject, or be limited to authors' profession, gender, circumstances of publication, e.g. specific journal, etc. This methodology would be irrelevant in relation to usernames.

Usernames have been associated with pseudonyms, based on self-selection as a key feature (e.g. Kołodziejczyk, 2004: 146; Rutkiewicz, 1999: 123). According to Van Langendonck (2007: 300): 'the (Internet) nickname (or short: 'nick') comes closest to the class of pseudonyms since, as a rule, these nicks are given by the name bearers themselves'. It should be noted, however, that self-naming and renaming practices are relatively common regarding official names (Alford, 1987: 81-95; Nikonov, 1974: 21-26)²⁷, and self-ascribed nicknames have also been reported from various places in the world, e.g. Zimbabwe (Mashiri, 2004: 40) and Lithuania (Butkus, 1999: 133). Additionally, neither pseudonyms nor usernames have to be self-selected or self-invented. Pseudonyms might be bestowed by journalists, family and friends, public opinion, fans, etc. Group members, like gangsters or those in literary circles, may name each other (Rainbolt, 2002; Rees and Noble, 1985: x, 62-63, 86-87; Świerczyńska, 1983: 261; Sharp, 1972: v-vii; Masanov, 1969: 56). It is also common for institutions to set legal names, student numbers or staff numbers as default identifiers; and in unofficial communication, real names as well as school or family nicknames, etc. are used (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003). Thus, self-naming as a feature of recognition might be questioned.

This is not the only source of haziness regarding equating pseudonyms and usernames. Rutkiewicz (1999: 118, 123), for example, states that the difference between them is that the main role of pseudonyms is to hide the real name, to misinform, whereas usernames' main function is to support communication by effective identification. This assertion seems imprecise. Indeed, pseudonyms replace or play the role of legal names; they are false on principle, and thus different from

²⁷ Other examples are given in Burt (2009: 236-245) and vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006).

the real ones (whereas usernames, as mentioned above, do not have to be false). However, both pseudonyms and usernames might be informative as well as misleading (which will be explained further). In addition, I would not say with certainty that the main role of usernames is to assist with communication. They enable users to enter the selected domain, represent them there, and serve as a tool of reference and address. However, there is no obligation to communicate. I would describe the main difference this way: a pseudonym implies existence of at least one more (real) name, whereas a username does not. We cannot say that a real name used online is a pseudonym; however, used online it does become a username.

Similarities between pseudonyms and usernames can also be observed, especially when we analyse the underlying motivations. Pseudonyms might be used to conceal identities or certain aspects of identities, or to claim other identities for reasons of civil and political, or social and conventional, character. First, restricted freedom of speech may put those expressing unaccepted views in danger of a penalty and force them to conceal their identities. Also, some social conventions might encourage anonymity.

For example, in the seventeenth century female authors started commonly using masculine names to avoid discrimination as writers and ostracism as individuals, but also currently females writing in supposedly masculine genres may need to conceal their gender to gain credibility (Świerczyńska, 1983: 21-37; Taylor and Mosher, 1951: 162-163). Similarly, pseudonymous usernames might be used to ‘protect a CMC user from adverse social reactions’ (Jaffe et al., 1995). 53.2% of users with usernames other than their own surveyed by Swennen (2001: 62) reported anonymity as the main reason for not using real names online; gender swapping as well as gender neutral usernames have been reported, too (Scheidt, 2001; Swennen, 2001). Jaffe et al. (1995) reports a higher tendency to mask gender in female participants than in males.

Others may employ pseudonyms to avoid being associated with activities perceived as controversial, e.g. porn stars or some strippers use cover names (Ashley, 1998: 302). Likewise, participant of USENET's *alt.binaries.pictures.erotica* group, where

sexually explicit conversation, pictures and videos are involved, utilise fake names as identifiers much more often than real names (Jaffe et al., 1995).

Some users create optional identities: they visit different domains under different names. For example, *Trixke*, a 36-year-old interviewed by Swennen (2001: 59), explains:

97% I use trixke and the remaining 3% pitou why because with pitou I go to special rooms. I am single and sometimes have a need in a spicy talk but I wouldn't like to have the reputation of trixke tarnished this way.²⁸

Likewise, it has not been an uncommon practice to use multiple pseudonyms to separate different fields, for publishing multiple items (several books in a short time, a number of articles in the same issue), or for *infra dig* activities, e.g. by serious authors for lighter writing, by artists for posters, book illustrations etc., or by composers for music reviews (Sharp, 1972: v-vii; Masanov, 1969: 256-258).

Names may also constitute elements of performers' image that reflect the nature of the bearer's performance. For example, the Renaissance physician Theophrastus Phillipus Aureolus Bombastus von Hohenheim called himself Paracelsus after Roman medic Aulus Cornelius Celsus; the 'horror rock' singer Vincent Damon Furnier named himself after the 17th century witch Alice Cooper; Dick Nasty and Wilde Oscar are porn actors; and Necrobutcher and Rob Zombie are rock and metal musicians.²⁹ Like pseudonyms, usernames may constitute a means of self-presentation. Researchers, such as Sidorova (2006: 74), Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003: 88), Swennen (2001: 67, 72), Bays (1998: 10), Bechar-Israeli (1995) and Jaffe et al. (1995), describe usernames as a kind of filter, a search tool to identify 'soulmates', or the way people promote themselves that hint at hobbies (*punkgirl*, *schumi*³⁰), expectations (*Szukam2polowy* 'looking for a second half', *A może romans?* 'How about an affair?'), values, roles and status (*niezalezna*³⁰,

²⁸ Translations reflect the style and punctuation of the original texts.


²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_pseudonyms

³⁰ After Michael Schumacher, a German racing driver (Swennen, 2001: 125).

‘independent30’, ****CO-LEADA OF THA GANGSTA BOYZ****), and other properties. Choosing usernames that reflect famous persons – for example, actors, writers, politicians, or fictional characters, such as *Гагарин* ‘Gagarin’, *Vonnegut* and *Анна Каренина* ‘Anna Karenina’ (Sidorova, 2006: 97) – may to some extent be compared to monks and nuns who name themselves after patron saints as declaration of their role models.

In the entertainment industry, using pseudonyms may replace difficult or plain names as many actors and their agents believe that a ‘catchy’ name will enhance career prospects. This is why *Marilyn Monroe* replaced Norma Jean Baker, *Pola Negri* replaced Apolonia Chałupiec and *Greta Garbo* replaced Greta Lovisa Gustafsson (Podsevatkin, 1999: 58, 144). Swennen (2001: 99-100) has observed that for some chatters the aesthetic value of their usernames is also important. They invent original names that sound and look attractive: *SecondSun*, *D@rkst@r[Tr]*.

Both pseudonyms and usernames may resemble ordinary names – ‘the unsuspected pseudonym fully covers the fact that the work is anonymous’, writes Ashley (1998: 301). A false name may replace only a given name or a surname, or all the components of an individual’s name (Sal’mon, 2002: 43). Regarding usernames, Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003: 89) recorded, apart from full customary names, comparatively frequent use of various forms of a given name (full, shortened, diminutive), often combined with a number (*Eve17*, *marcin16*, *An25na*), or a toponym (*kuba_berlin*, *pawel.krakow*).

Internet communication is still based on written text, even though some environments allow the use of a camera, microphone and headphones, or the use of a graphic avatar as a visual representation. In usernames this is reflected for instance in usage of visual effects, non-alphabetical symbols and unpronounceable names, such as: *^_^*, *???*, *cLoNehEAd*, *m@d* and *me33* (Kołodziejczyk, 2004: 158; Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003; Bechar-Israeli, 1995). These usernames are reminiscent of graphonyms – pseudonyms that are in the form of non-alphabetical symbols or that contain graphic elements. Probably the best known example is that of a musician known as Prince who changed his stage name to the symbol , but a number of

authors have also signed their works with graphonyms, such as asteronyms and cruxonyms (stars and crosses), e.g. ***; + + +, numeronyms, e.g. $\frac{1}{2}$ *doff* for Demidoff; various symbols, such as zodiac symbols, heraldic symbols, and symbols of Freemasonry; various conventional signs, such as triangles, crowns, circles, and arrows; and combinations (Rutkiewicz, 1999: 123; Świerczyńska, 1983: 285).

To summarise, there are similarities as well as differences between pseudonyms and usernames. Both pseudonyms and usernames facilitate a chosen degree of anonymity, selective identity revelation and creation of multiple identities as well as self-advertising. Resemblance is also observable in a playful character of certain entities. Nevertheless, the groups differ in their relation to official naming: pseudonyms differ from legal names by definition, while official names may serve as usernames (although both pseudonyms and usernames may be in the form of false customary names). Also, pseudonyms typically apply to the professional activity of renowned figures – hence the research based on attribution, which would not apply to usernames, while CMC covers professional as well as social and private aspects of people’s activity. If the aim of pseudonyms is to attract audience’s attention, it is directed toward a product or the activity, while usernames are used to encourage individuals to a direct contact.

Further research might show that the closest resemblance can perhaps be observed in blogs and personal web pages, reminiscent of traditional publicity in showing a similar dichotomy of producers and audiences, where the author is a central figure of the discourse. Another relevant example may constitute persons recognisable from their real-world activity who also publish online. For example, on the Russian version of LiveJournal we can find a selection of blogs authored by actual public figures. They advertise under invented usernames but their real names are also revealed, e.g. Tatyana Tolstaya (a writer), username *tanyant*; Marina Litvinovich (a politician), username *abstract2001*; and Yevgenii Khramkov (a musician), username *dj-hacker*.

2.2. Are usernames new nicknames?

Political organization of everyday life underlies nicknaming
(Adams, 2009: 89)

As mentioned before, pseudonyms are typically ‘addressed’ to a larger or smaller group of anonymous audience. Contrary to this, nicknames circulate between people who are members of the same community.

‘Nicknames’ is a very wide and quite undefined class; as Franklyn (1962: xii) has rightly noted: ‘What is a nickname? Everybody knows what a nickname is, but few could define it’.

Researchers may have various concepts of what groups of names classify as nicknames. Some accept hypocoristic, diminutive and augmentative forms of given names as nicknames while others exclude these from the definition (Holland, 1990: 266). Carlsson (1989: 11), for example, divides the more general class of by-names into four subclasses: local by-names (referring to the place), by-names of relationships, occupational by-names and nicknames, where a group of nicknames is narrowed into the characterising appellations. Anderson (2007: 97), on the contrary, considers nicknames as a wider class, which contains by-names, hypocorisms, lall³¹ names and patronymics. Moore (1993: 67-68) has put forward a ‘two-tiered model’ of nickname classification that includes both the restricted definition of nicknames as meaningful designations, which he calls ‘true’ or ‘prototypical’, and the broader one, to which he refers as to ‘secondary’ or ‘derivative’. Despite differences, generally onomasticians agree that nicknames are additional and informal names (ICOS, 2011).

Usernames are often referred to as ‘nicknames’ or ‘nicks’ (Van Langendonck, 2007; Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003; Swennen, 2001; Bays, 1998; Bechar-Israeli, 1995), and many other languages, such as Russian, Polish and Dutch, have adopted this

³¹ ‘Lall names derive from children's mispronunciations of existing names or common nouns, or adults’ imitation of such childish (in)capacities’, such as French Mimi, Loulou; possibly also Old English Bab(b)a. (Anderson, 2007: 92, 97)

term from English. This is perfectly fine for everyday communication; however, researchers may need to use onomastic terminology with a greater precision.

A number of researchers have suggested that the system of nicknames has developed as identification support, especially in communities where members share their legal names (Anderson, 2007: 103; Butkus, 1999: 125; Holland, 1990: 256, 258). This is readily apparent in Amish communities, whose selection of names is restricted to those from the Bible (Enninger, 1985: 245). This already exposes a difference between nicknames and usernames: the former indicate that the community members know each other's names, which is not typical for Internet participants. Moreover, usernames are the main means of identification online and not additional to this.

On the other hand, nicknaming, which seems to be a universal phenomenon, is not restricted to people bearing the same names or to communities that need an additional system of identification. Van Langendonck (2007: 193) gives an example of Germanic tribes who had a flexible, sufficient naming system, but still developed nicknames. He concludes that: 'Indeed, a general motive for nicknaming is people's need to characterize others.' Also according to Danilina (1979: 294), studies on Russian materials demonstrate the secondary status of the differentiating function of investigated nicknames. Undeniably, the need to create these often judgemental names must be extremely strong: they are, for example, widely used in conservative Muslim Kuwait although the *Qur'ān* prohibits such practices (Haggan, 2008: 81-94). Similarly, they have been reported as a 'major concern' in a traditional Amish culture (Enninger, 1985: 252).

Furthermore, numerous studies prove that nicknames retain a close link with a community where they are created, and often only members of a particular group are competent to use them correctly (Adams, 2009; Anderson, 2007; Crozier, 2004; Holland, 1990; Leslie and Skipper, 1990). For example, Gasque (1994: 122) indicated that they are often used in places corresponding with Goffman's (1961: 61-66) definition of total institutions, where a large number of people are kept together full time, whereas according to Mashiri (2004: 23) they are typical for small groups

characterised by face-to-face relations. Enninger (1985: 254) described nicknames as ‘nodes in the internal network of unofficial sociopsychological relationships’.

Some nicknames do not function as a means of address – as Van Langendonck (2007: 317) has commented, adults’ by-names are infrequently used as address forms compared to the juvenile ones. What is more, one may not know that they have been nicknamed; for example, teachers are usually nicknamed ‘behind their backs’ (Crozier, 2004: 83; Mashiri, 2004: 25). In addition, men appear to be nicknamed more often than women (Haggan, 2008; Van Langendonck, 2007; Mashiri, 2004; Butkus, 1999), and children and teenagers more often than adults (Van Langendonck, 2007; Mashiri, 2004; Leslie and Skipper, 1990), whereas usernames are obligatory for all CMC participants.

Nicknames are often described as very accurate (e.g. Haggan, 2008; Holland, 1990). Enninger (1985: 250) calls nicknames ‘highly individualized onomastic items’ that indicate a ‘unique characteristic of the one so named’. Research suggests that irrespective of cultures or social environments, nicknames seem to be similarly inspired by the following list of characteristics (Haggan, 2008; Crozier, 2004; Mashiri, 2004; Butkus, 1990; Holland, 1990; Enninger, 1985; Gasque, 1994):

- Physical features: appearance, motion, physiological and speech idiosyncrasies, age – usually the largest group of nicknames (*Diedukas* ‘old man’, *Kleiva* < *kleivas* ‘bow-legged’, *Porky Dan*, *Jaindi* ‘giant’).
- Personality traits, temperament, habits, behaviour, attitudes (*Abeeta* ‘idiot’, *Ustadh Kashka* ‘Mr Show-off’, *Pope*, *Sloppy Steve*, *Dirty Tom*).
- Occupation and other activities (*Al Sha’era* ‘the poetess’, *Smuikas* ‘violin’, *Aludaris* ‘brewer’).
- Origins, nationality, location (*Kampinis* ‘corner’, *Sibiriakas*, *Amerikonas*).
- Kinship references: genealogical and marital (*Adomiene* ‘wife of Adomas’, *Monikenas* ‘husband of Monika’, *Sonny* ‘little son’).

- Given and family names: phonetic and semantic associations (*Dutch* < *Duche*, *Hitleris* < *Adolfas*, *Kranklys* ‘raven’ < surname *Krankauskas*).
- Events, situations (*Degtukas* ‘a match’, *Groceries*, *Votes*).
- Financial situation, status (*Buržujas* ‘bourgeois’, *Doleris* ‘dollar’, *Aukso Kiaulė* ‘golden pig’, *Plikienė* < *plikas* ‘naked’).
- Speech content: favourite topics, phrases and bywords (*Supranti* ‘you understand’, *Vanius* < *vana* ‘therefore’).
- Names of famous people and characters – especially self-praising nicknames (*Superman*, *Chomsky*, *Macduff*, *Peter the Great*).

Usernames are also highly individual; they typically have to be unique within the community. However, the connection between the bearer and the semantic content of the name in the case of usernames, in contrast to that of nicknames, very possibly is subjective and unverifiable, as in a majority of informal CMC users select their usernames and, apart from some restrictions, decide on their form and content. Usernames are also often etymologically transparent and share with nicknames a number of thematic fields from which they are derived (Van Langendonck, 2007: 301-306; Sidorova, 2006: 95-96; Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003; Scheidt, 2001; Swennen, 2001: 97-136; Bechar-Israeli, 1995), such as:

- Appearance: *Голубоглазая* ‘blue eyed’, *Рыжая* ‘ginger’, *handsom*, *Wysoka Brunetka* ‘tall brunette’.
- Personality: *Mily Chlopak* ‘nice boy’, *Креативная* ‘creative’, *shydude*, *Sarcasmo*, *Romantyczna* ‘romantic’.
- Occupation, hobby and other activities: *Часовщик* ‘watchmaker’, *pilot*, *Nurse*, *skatewifj* ‘skating female’, *punkgirl*, *Jazzboy*.
- Origins, nationality, residence: *Dutchguy*, *El_ingles*, *Leuven*, *Грек* ‘Greek’, *Justyna25Warszawa*.

- Kinship, affiliations: *Дочь Билла Гейтса* ‘Bill Gates’s daughter’, *bfiancee*, ****kandi's man 4life****.
- Names: *Sofie*, *eprenen* ‘E. Prenen’, *Прасковья* ‘Praskovia’, *leintje* ‘Marjolein’ (diminutive), *Ola_Ola*.
- Status: *Ваше Высочество* ‘your majesty’, *prinseske* ‘little princess’, *director*.
- Names of famous people and characters: *Анна Каренина* ‘Anna Karenina’, *Саурон* ‘Sauron’, *Ленин* ‘Lenin’, *Вольтер* ‘Voltaire’, *Гагарин* ‘Gagarin’.

Both nicknames and usernames often refer to physical features and various aspects of personality as well as professions, hobbies and other activities, places, nationalities and relationships with other people. Another comparatively large group in both classes consists of various forms of conventional names, as well as names of famous real or fictional figures. Biographical anecdotes and events, as well as status, also seem to inspire creators of both nicknames and usernames.

But there is more to nicknames than just an accurate description of the named. Nicknames are often described as a powerful tool of social control, which serves to define, express and maintain the character of social relationships, such as integration, solidarity, intimacy and enmity (Adams, 2009; Crozier, 2004; Mashiri, 2004; Gasque, 1994; Holland, 1990; Leslie and Skipper, 1990). According to Gasque (1994: 123), nicknames ‘accentuate the relationship as it is perceived to be: more intimacy if intimate, enmity or contempt if distant’.

Nicknames are said to impose community norms by highlighting inappropriate behaviour or undesirable characteristics (Adams, 2009; Haggan, 2008; Mashiri, 2004; Butkus, 1999; Gasque, 1994; Danilina, 1979). Butkus (1999: 136), who investigated Lithuanian countryside nicknames, has observed that nicknames constitute a ‘reaction of members of the community to some individual human feature, which seems to them unusual and perhaps even unacceptable because it is rare and not typical of the community’. Mashiri (2004: 34) has also noticed that

Shona people use nicknames to indicate and discipline ‘deviant behaviour or personalities’.

Perhaps this explains high rates of critical nicknames – some of them are specifically invented to hurt or embarrass the named person (Haggan, 2008; Crozier, 2004; Butkus, 1999). According to Adams (2009: 87), ‘nicknaming is very close to scapegoating, because nicknaming is potentially a taunt and, as with ‘rukka’ in Faroese culture, the nicknamed must decide what to do about the taunt.’³² Nicknames may also express prejudice against certain social groups, often minorities (Algeo, 1985b: 191). Crozier (2004: 96) has noted that ‘Name-calling in general relates to asymmetries in power relationships, and typically the less powerful are called names by those who have more power.’ But nicknames may also be used as a reaction or revenge against the oppressors and to express solidarity and support.

Username may also reflect the users’ tastes, viewpoints, values and characteristics, but, contrary to nicknames, they tend to highlight favourable ones, e.g. *Mily Chlopak* ‘nice boy’, *Fajny facio* ‘fine bloke’, *Urocza* ‘charming’ (f), *Och-czarujący* ‘oh-so-charming’ (m), *Cool Guy* and *Lovely girl* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 92). A small number of usernames display a self-deprecating character: *Неудачница* ‘loser’ (Sidorova, 2006: 96), *brzydka* ‘ugly’, *stary i glupi* ‘old and stupid’ and *degenerat* ‘degenerate’ (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 94). According to Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003: 95), this might be another strategy to attract attention, possibly applying to other people’s sympathy. There are also usernames that are provocative, or that contain strong language, such as *Osama bin Laden* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 91), *bUtTmAn*, *klootzakske* ‘little asshole’ (Van Langendonck, 2007: 306; Swennen, 2001: 130), *hitler* and *fuckjesus* (Bechar-Israeli, 1995). They are infrequent, but CMC is not uncontrolled, for example, many domains use filters to block swearwords. It is likely that they are meant to be original and are supposed to appeal to curiosity. For example, *Osama bin Laden*, when asked why they selected

³² This is how Adams (2009: 87-88) explains this phenomenon: ‘Faroese discourse includes taunting as an artful strategy to validate the principle that anger is an unacceptable emotion. Taunting angers the *rukka* and exposes him to the ridicule; (...) Offensive nicknames are often taunts, attempts by namers to construct power by using them, daring the nicknamed to respond.’

this username, answered: ‘To attract your attention and it’s worked’ (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 90).

As nicknames are so interconnected with the society, they are also affected by changes in it. When societies become more mobile and fragmented, many people engage externally rather than locally, which limits opportunities of both origination and circulation of nicknames. Nicknames also seem to be losing their relevance in light of contemporary social tendencies to disapprove of offensive practices (Van Langendonck, 2007: 193; Holland, 1990: 255-272; Leslie and Skipper, 1990: 276; Barrett, 1978). Usernames, which are at times transferred to ‘real life’ and private electronic correspondence (Swennen, 2001: 80³³; Rutkiewicz, 1999: 123; Bechar-Israeli, 1995), might form a modern alternative and eventually replace old-fashioned nicknames.

The common feature that traditional nicknames and usernames have is etymological transparency. The important difference between them lies in that nicknames only appear within communities, while usernames are selected before joining a community. Hence, nicknames typically result from interactions, whereas usernames are necessary to interact and may influence the decision to undertake an interaction. It would be interesting to observe if there exist online communities that have developed nicknaming systems, what characteristics these communities have, and how nicknames function on the Internet.

2.3. Is a username a ‘second first name’?

[N]aming converts ‘anybodies’ into ‘somebodies’
(Geertz, 1973: 363)

It seems to be taken for granted that usernames should be classified as ‘unofficial’, ‘secondary’, ‘substitutive’ or ‘supplementary’, in contrast to official, ‘real’ names (Van Langendonck, 2007: 189; Rutkiewicz, 1999: 118), and that they are freely

³³ For example, 44.8% of Swennen’s (2001: 80) informants keep using their usernames when they meet their CMC interlocutors offline.

invented under no control whatsoever. For example, Kołodziejczyk (2004: 146) states:

First of all, no principles accompany their creation. The authors of the identifiers are not restricted by any legal, administrative or customary considerations and do not comply with the rules of correct spelling, thus the created forms do not come under the same legal sanction as e.g. given names or surnames.

These opinions could be disputed. We can say about pseudonyms that they are substitute names – they are false names that are used instead of, and play the roles of, the real ones. In turn, nicknames can be described as supplementary – they supplement a selection of alternative devices of address and reference. Depending on the social situation we can use, for example, a given name, a surname, a title or a nickname. None of the above, however, relates to usernames. They do not replace real names: the real ones can equally be utilised on the Internet. They do not supplement real names either: systems do not permit multiple names for one logging act. Thus, one cannot register under several alternative usernames – each name will be treated as a separate entity. Instead, usernames are an obligatory tool to log on and a main means of reference, address and identification. In this sense, usernames can be compared to official names: that they are a customary means of identification on the Internet and are not optional.

Additionally, Internet communities are not entirely informal and uncontrolled events. There is always an administrative body behind the scenes, as well as specific actions required in order to register, and rules of conduct. The discourse is normally under control and a breach of customary behaviour norms of a particular site may result in a temporary or permanent ban of an IP address from it. Similarly to official names, usernames represent the population members and are necessary to participate in CMC. During the registration process (or upon entering the site if registration is not required) everybody is normally asked to choose a name, by which they are addressed or referred to not only by interlocutors, but also in formal discourse: by operators (such as warnings for misbehaviour) and in automated announcements (such as ‘user...has entered the chat room’, ‘user...has left’, ‘user...is inviting you to a private room’). There are also regulations regarding the name choice, e.g. the

length of the name and the keyboard symbols that are allowed. In some domains usernames cannot begin with a number (Swennen, 2001: 19), some use filters that prevent the use of swearwords, and so on. Typically, usernames must be unique – more than one participant cannot use the same name at the same time. Additionally, many domains enable registration, which protects the usernames with passwords – only someone who knows the password is able to log on with such names. Some services offer also certified registration of usernames, e.g. <http://nick-name.ru> and <http://nicknameregister.com>. Official regulations vary between countries; for example, Polish law provides the same level of protection to usernames as is provided to personal names, pseudonyms and brands to protect the users' identity and earned reputation (Sąd Najwyższy, 2008).

Both given names and usernames are influenced by environmental and individual tastes, values and worldviews; they often carry emotional and symbolic meanings, such as wishful names that display desirable personal qualities, hopes for a good fortune and other aspirations. People of many cultures and various historical periods have believed that names are able to attribute desirable qualities to the named (Anderson, 2007: 85; Nikonov, 1974: 30). Similarly, many Internet users trust that attractive names may enhance their attractiveness and popularity (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 96; Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Jaffe et al., 1995). In both given names and usernames, the desired attributes might be indicated directly, for example:

- Given names: *Хоробрит* 'brave', *Гораздъ* 'talented', *Славна* 'eminent' (Superanskaia, 2004: 158, 337, 399, 434), *Luftar* 'brave', *Besnik* 'faithful', *Urta* 'wise' (Doja, 2006: 249).
- Usernames: *Crazysexycool*, *Bogini seksu* 'sex goddess', *przystojny* 'handsome', *Uroczna* 'charming' (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003), *^Prettie Mandy^*, *HOT GUY 16*, **The Super Seeexay Pieemp** (Scheidt, 2001).

Also, various associative strategies can be used to generate relevant connotations indirectly, such as:

1. Naming after related or non-related role models, religious or historical figures, celebrities, and other:

- Given names: naming after a saint to secure their patronage (Nikonov, 1974: 28), using surnames of famous figures as first names: *Aranit*, *Barleti* (figures from Albanian history), *Washington*, *Roosevelt* (Doja, 2006: 249).
- Usernames: *James B.*, *MacGyver* (Kołodziejczyk, 2004: 154), *Fidel*, *Atena* (Rutkiewicz, 1999: 117), *Гагарин* ‘Gagarin’, *vonnegut* (Sidorova, 2006: 97).

2. References to nature:

- Given names: *Bilbil* ‘nightingale’, *Luan* ‘lion’, *Shquipe* ‘eagle’ (Doja, 2006: 249), *Pob Tsuas* ‘rocky mountain’, *Paj* ‘flower’, *Tsawb* ‘banana tree’ (Burt, 2009: 239).
- Usernames: *вольный ветер* ‘free wind’, *Кактус* ‘cactus’, *Белый волк* ‘white wolf’ (Sidorova, 2006: 92), *froggy*, *coolfox* (Bechar-Israeli, 1995), *Tulipan* ‘tulip’, *Viper*, *raven* (Kołodziejczyk, 2004: 154-155).

3. References to artefacts:

- Given names: *Phawv* ‘little rice basket’, *Tooj* ‘copper’ (Burt, 2009: 239, 241, 244), *Doolar* ‘dollar’, *Toyota*, *Sharehah* ‘sim card’ (Al-Zumor, 2009: 21-23).
- Usernames: *BMW*, *Mig* (Bechar-Israeli, 1995), *koekje* ‘cookie’, *Acertje* (diminutive ‘Acer’) (Van Langendonck, 2007: 301-306; Swennen, 2001: 117, 127), *Ключик* ‘little key’, *Зеркало* ‘mirror’ (Sidorova, 2006: 95-96), *Perelka* ‘little pearl’, *szabelka* ‘little sword’ (Kołodziejczyk, 2004: 158).

4. References to abstract phenomena:

- Given names: *Bashkim* ‘union’, *Liri* ‘freedom’, *Fitore* ‘victory’ (Doja, 2006: 249), *Izdihaar* ‘prosperity’, *Fikrah* ‘idea’ (Al-Zumor, 2009: 24).
- Usernames: *свет вечности* ‘light of eternity’, *боль* ‘pain’, *Мистика* ‘mysticism’ (Sidorova, 2006: 95-96), *soul*, *spirit* (Bechar-Israeli, 1995).

There are also other observable patterns and tactics related to naming online that are reminiscent of the practices in customary naming. Institutionalised renaming in line with life experience and conduct of the named is also a common practice across cultures. Typically, they mark life stages, such as reaching adulthood, getting married and becoming a parent; dramatic and tragic events, such as serious illness and death of a relative; or a status change, for example in relation to a significant accomplishment, but also at the whim of the named person. Sometimes a name change is used to rid oneself of an unwanted identity (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2006; Alford, 1987: 85-95; Kriukov, 1986; Nikonov, 1974: 21). Burt's (2009: 236, 240) investigation of naming habits among Hmong-Americans revealed 'eight possible occasions during the lifespan when naming or renaming could take place'. A name change is, for example, recommended if it is incompatible with a child's personality, as it is believed that an unsuitable name might make a child fussy or ill.

Differentiating between individuals' identities and roles is also supported by the systems of addressing and referencing. As explained before (p. 37) in some societies various names are used in different social situations, while in other – different and terms of reference and address. In CMC, the practice of changing usernames is also comparatively popular, e.g. some 30% of CMC users examined by Swennen (2001: 57, 85) admitted having used more than one username. According to Bechar-Israeli (1995), although most Internet Relay Chat (IRC) participants prefer to build recognisable identities related to one username, some of them have different names for each chat room, while others 'try on' several usernames before they choose a suitable one. Users may also update their usernames correspondingly with changes in their lives (Stommel, 2007: 148-149). Thus, in both online and offline situations name change and acquisition, as well as using various address and reference terms in different social situations, seem to be used to frame certain settings, or to focus the attention on a specific status, role or other identity aspect.

A characteristic that distinguishes usernames, together with pseudonyms and nicknames, from official given names, is that given names are never collective; examples of collective usernames are: *marta_z_bratem* 'Marta with brother',

mlode_Malzenstwo ‘young married couple’ (<http://czat.wp.pl>, 06/03/2010), *MandyandChristina*, 2 *HOT CHICKS* (Scheidt, 2001).

What unites usernames with official naming is their universal character. It might seem too speculative, but it would be interesting to focus on the Internet as alternative social reality (or realities), and view the system of usernames as an alternative naming system (or systems). As the pace of change online is arguably higher than offline, we could perhaps expect to have an opportunity to observe the process of emergence and development of a naming system ‘in a nutshell’. The virtual reality is necessarily constructed in relation to the offline reality as its point of reference because this is its place of origin. As for the naming, there are, as we have seen, observable similarities between the practices offline and online. If we observe Internet naming in various settings – across language sectors, types of communities, modes of communication, and newly emerging varieties of CMC – and try to spot regularities, discrepancies and possibly interrelations, perhaps we could find and relate these to the analogous processes within offline naming systems and learn something new about naming practices in general.

2.4. Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to reveal similarities and differences between usernames and other groups of anthroponyms – pseudonyms, nicknames and given names – in order to characterise usernames as an onomastic class. Among other things, this chapter included a brief debate on self-naming, the reasons for using fake names both offline and online, and how both pseudonyms and usernames relate to official names. It then outlined how the social contexts of both nicknaming and Internet naming account for their role in interaction and how they compare as tools of address, reference, identification and characterisation. Common etymological motivations of both groups have also been presented. Finally, the chapter compared creation and usage in given names and usernames as well as their positions within naming systems.

I have demonstrated that while usernames share a number of properties with other anthroponomastic classes, they retain a number of unique characteristics. Like

pseudonyms, usernames might serve to secure anonymity, as well as to self-advertise. Unlike pseudonyms, however, which are typically used in professional settings and target a larger or smaller group of an anonymous audience, usernames serve to manage direct communication. Similarly to nicknames, usernames are often descriptive; however, nicknames are invented and utilised exclusively within communities, and firmly bound with the nature of relationships between them, while usernames are needed before any interaction begins. Usernames are customary names online, like official names are offline. On the other hand, they represent a different concept of a named entity than given names or official personal names in general: namely, one username does not have to correspond with a single individual, whereas official names always represent individuals. Perhaps most importantly, it is noticeable that usernames as well as all other analysed classes of names are inevitably connected with one or another aspect of identities of the named people.

II

IDENTITY

There is no truth. There is only perception.

Gustave Flaubert

In the previous unit, I outlined the main concerns in the field of name studies and attempted to establish the place for usernames within anthroponomastics. A number of observations can be made to help to direct the further course of the current work and establish the best method of inquiry.

To begin with, the key phenomenon related to names seems to be identity. Naming ascribes social identities to objects, places and people and makes them part of the social world (Alford, 1987: 29), while anthroponyms, more specifically, reflect the socio-cultural concepts of people's identities, and allocate individual's place in social reality. As Geertz (1973: 363) puts it:

The everyday world in which the members of any community move, their taken-for-granted field of social action, is populated not by anybodies, faceless men without qualities, but by somebodies, concrete classes of determinate persons positively characterized and appropriately labeled.

This is why the study of names is in essence about the link between names and identity. The theoretical, philosophical divagations are to solve the issue of the relationship between names and identity – namely, whether or not it is purely referential. The cognitive approach focuses on how names are mentally processed in relation to one's identity. Finally, ethnographic and anthropological studies reveal how names reflect concepts of socio-cultural identities. Brennen (2000: 139) explicitly defined the meaning of names as their relation to identity:

In cognitive psychology there is an empirical database and several theoretical strands which suggest that one's name plays no (or very little) role in constructing, developing, and maintaining one's identity.

Next, the link between the name and identity expresses itself in identifying individuals and ascribing them to various categories. The categorising work might be performed through semantics of names as well as varieties of name classes (such as

given names, surnames, patronyms, clan names and teknonyms) and their forms (i.e. full forms or short, diminutive and augmentative forms, as well as combinations with other names, titles, etc.).

Then, observing naming practices reveals the constructed, negotiated and fluid character of social reality and of identity. For example, by framing specific social roles and life stages, names demonstrate that individual identities are fragmented and socially constructed. The categories that people are ascribed to by naming ‘are not given in the nature of things – they are historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually applied’ (Geertz, 1973: 363). On a cultural level, various naming systems indicate cultural differences between identity concepts. Socially, naming may show the fluidity of social identities from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Firstly, various naming options are typically prescribed for different social situations. Secondly, naming preferences may vary between social groups. Additionally, naming practices reflect social changes. Finally, the identity concepts that find their reflection in a naming repertoire manifest themselves and operate through individual name choices.

The demonstration of the link between names and identity is best performed by investigating the actual usage of names by *competent users*, defined, in reminder, as ‘a speaker who is able to use a name successfully for the purposes at hand and according to the applicable standards’ (García-Ramírez, 2010: 13).

Considering the above, the second part of this work will focus on the link between usernames and identity. As a methodological framework, I have selected ethnomethodology (EM). I find it relevant as it approaches our taken-for-granted reality as constructed on an ongoing basis through everyday activities. I find it useful and applicable because it provides methodological instructions to approach membership categorisation performed through social action – and name selection definitely is a social action. Also, it is reliable as an approach to actual language usage as it focuses on naturally occurring data and takes on participants’ perspective. And, as will become clearer in the following sections, it relies on people’s agency and competency in using the tools available to them to manage their everyday reality.

1. The concept of identity

The first use of the term ‘identity’ was recorded in 1570 as ‘identitie’ and meant ‘the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness’ (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 18). In this sense it has long been a fundamental concept in logic, expressed by the formula $A \text{ is } A$ (Hicks, 1913: 375). The concept of identity as a psychosocial phenomenon is comparatively recent, and often associated with psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (e.g. 1968), who was the first to use it, especially in the widely recognised expression ‘identity crisis’.³⁴ Others, however, trace the studies on identity back to Mead (e.g. 1913), sociologist, psychologist and philosopher, who is thought to have initiated the theoretical perspective in social psychology known as Symbolic Interactionism. Research into identity was particularly popularised by Goffman (e.g. 1959) (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 2–3; Cerulo, 1997: 385)

There does not seem to be any uniform definition of identity. In general, the term is used to indicate ‘who people are in relation to each other’, and a number of terms are often used interchangeably with the term identity, such as self, selfhood, position, role, category, subject, subjectivity, persona and other (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 5–6). As Zotzman and O’Regan (2016: 113) put it: ‘The concept of identity links the level of the individual with the social and thus allows us to capture the processes by which we convey to one another what kind of people we are.’ This can be further specified depending on the field, theory, methodology, etc.

For example, Agha (2007: 235) describes identity as follows:

What is the rubric called ‘identity’ a name for? What are the things it names? It is a way of talking about the emblematic functions of signs in behavior. An emblem is a thing to which a social persona is attached. It involves three elements; (1) a perceivable thing, or diacritic; (2) a social persona; (3)

³⁴ Erikson experienced an identity crisis himself, which found its expression in name change. Born to an unknown father, named Salomonsen and then Homburger after his mother’s first and second husbands, he renamed himself Erik Erikson (Erik, the son of Erik) to express his ‘fatherhood’ of his own identity (Room, 2010: 166).

someone for whom it is an emblem (i.e., someone who can read that persona from that thing).

Antaki and Widdicombe (1998: 3) explain: ‘for a person to “have an identity” – whether he or she is the person speaking, being spoken to, or being spoken about – is to be cast into a *category with associated characteristics or features*’.

In addition to this, identity always exists in relation to other identities and is best captured in its difference from them rather than in its ‘positive content’. This difference is thus the ‘constitutive of identity’ (Ott, 2003: 57).

Some claim that the term ‘identity’ has been overused. For example, Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 1–2) argue that, depending on the way it is used, ‘identity’ can mean ‘too much’, ‘too little’ or ‘nothing at all’; it is too ambiguous to be used adequately and in many cases it would be better replaced by other more specific terms that may express the concept in hand more effectively.

In Sociolinguistics in its broad sense, the concept of identity is linked with the social functioning of language. It relates to people as language users in various aspects: the conditions under which they use the language, their relations to other users of language, the linguistic tools they use to convey meanings, and so on (Zotzman and O’Regan, 2016: 113). In this work, defining the notion of identity as ‘who people are to each other, and how they understand one another’s functioning’ will be sufficient. What is important is to identify the best methodological approach to demonstrate how names, used by competent language speakers, interrelate with the concept of identity. The first step for this will be to outline two main ideas about identity that are typically referred to in the identity research: essentialism (the idea that identities are internal and pre-discursive) and constructionism (the idea that identities are constructed in the discourse).

1.1. Essentialist approaches

This approach to identity can be traced back to early concepts of people’s characteristics as personal rather than social phenomena, in other words properties that people may or may not project, or ‘activate’, during social encounters. These

concepts developed and changed in accordance with dominant trends regarding the nature of reality and the functioning of human beings. For example, while the Enlightenment (known for the development of experimental scientific methods and tendencies towards secularisation) produced the idea of a human as a rational, self-reflective subject, Romanticism responded with an idea of ‘anti-empirical, expressive individualism’. Psychoanalysis later added the aspect of socialisation as a formative element of the personality, but the core, or essence, of a person was still perceived to be its inherent trait (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 7–8, 17–20; Widdicombe, 1998: 194). As Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 7) notice, this idea about identity is often exploited in various self-help and pseudo-therapeutic books and programmes that present identity as something stable and substantial that can be ‘worked on’, developed, or improved. In this respect, everyday use of the notion of identity (such as in the terms ‘identity card’ or ‘identity fraud’) is essentialist as it understands identity as a quality that is ‘owned’ by an individual, is fixed, and can thus be validated, falsified or stolen.

Essentialist collective identities are similarly conceptualised: members of social groups share internalised qualities, and this results in a shared, ‘unified’ and ‘singular’ social experience (Cerulo, 1997: 386–387). As Bucholtz (2003: 400) explains:

Essentialism is the position that the attributes and behaviour of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: (1) that groups can be clearly delimited; and (2) that group members are more or less alike.

An example of this kind of approach might be structuralist-functionalist theories in sociology, where identities such as working class, middle class, blue collar, professional and so on ‘are treated as corresponding to an independently existing social structure, and researchers aim to specify the criteria which define class’. This concept has also been used to define elements of culture or lifestyle of tribes and other collectives in social anthropology, or (on a broader scale) to ‘define national identities through geographical boundaries, a common language or ethnicity’

(Widdicombe, 1998: 192-193). In Sociolinguistics, the essentialist approach is largely utilised by the Variationists.

Variationist Sociolinguistics (VS) focus on collective identities and observe language as an expression of social group membership. It focuses on patterns in language variation and change (pronunciation, word choice, morphology and syntax) by observing linguistic features which vary between social groups, such as saying ‘fink’ instead of ‘think’ or ‘-in’ instead of ‘-ing’ at the end of a word. The key concept is that variation is not random but systematic and structured, and that ‘a significant proportion of variation can be attributed to social reasons’, meaning that there is a correlation between variation and the social identity of the speaker. This idea is used to explain social differences in life opportunities, career patterns, educational achievement, voting tendencies, and so on, helping to explain how social structures affect people’s lives. This concept of identity therefore operates as a demographic category, such as social class, ethnic group or gender, serving as an ‘explanatory variable’ used ‘to make causal predictions’ about peoples’ behaviours and attitudes. Although this approach treats identity as social, at the same time it understands its character as an internalised identification with a specific social group preceding the interaction, and is therefore essential in nature. Labov (e.g. 1966) is considered the founder of VS (Drummond and Schlee, 2016: 50–51; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 8; Widdicombe, 1998: 193–194).

The idea of identity within VS has evolved, and there have been three waves of VS that differ in their view and use the concept of identity: the macro-, meso- and micro-identity frames (Drummond and Schlee, 2016: 50–54). The first wave of VS focuses on language variation and change in relation to broad, macro-sociological categories such as gender, social class, age and ethnicity. It uses large-scale population surveys that are meant to produce statistically representative, objective and replicable results that provide a ‘bird’s-eye view of variation’. In fact, in the early works, the notion of ‘identity’ was rarely theorised or even mentioned, as identity can hardly ever be linked directly to the large category labels used in this type of quantitative study. However, it is clear that these works reflect the identities that are stable and unified (Drummond and Schlee, 2016: 51; Dodsworth, 2009: 1315).

In the second wave of VS the focus differs in scale, but the concept of identity remains that of a fixed and stable identity, which manifests itself by the fact that variable linguistic features are still considered to mark certain social groups. This approach accounts for locally recognised social groups, often called ‘communities of practice’, and individual mobility as well as the changing structure of society. Thus, rather than imposing identity categories on speakers, the researchers who embrace this form of VS observe groups that are salient to the speakers themselves. The studies, typically based on ethnographic observation, investigate qualities shared by members of these communities, such as ways of talking, beliefs, values and power relations. (Drummond and Schlee, 2016: 52; Dodsworth, 2009: 1316–1325).

Both the first and the second waves of VS focused on social structure. The third wave refocuses attention onto language in practice: the social structure is viewed as a system of constraints that regulates the language use which simultaneously reproduces the system. Social meanings of variables are not constant but depend on the context, thus, they may express various identities under different circumstances. The way language is used might be habitual, but also deliberate, which seems to reconceptualise identity as more dynamic and changeable rather than fixed and stable (Drummond and Schlee, 2016: 53–55).

During its progression, VS acquired awareness of the complexity of relationship between social identities and linguistic forms: namely, the fact that linguistic features do not constitute their direct manifestations. Rather, certain linguistic forms are conjoined with specific characteristics, which become associated with specific social categories that are assumed to use these forms. For example, the ‘mitigating’ language linked with ‘femininity’ may be used by groups of less powerful society members which includes (but is not limited to) many women (e.g. Jaffe, 2009b: 12–13; Bucholtz, 2009: 147; Coupland and Coupland, 2009: 227). However, identities still function as a source and explanation rather than the product of linguistic activity.

1.2. Constructionist approaches

The Constructionist approach in Sociolinguistics investigates how speakers use language to construct identities through communication. Language use is not a

reflection of pre-existing identities but the very process of construction and co-construction of identities between the interacting parties. It is not that people have certain identities that cause feelings and actions; rather, they work to achieve one or another identity. There is no category whose members essentially and uniquely share certain properties; therefore, any collective is an artificial, socially fabricated construct. Even taken-for-granted identities are constructed (Zotzman and O'Regan, 2016: 123–124; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 34–35; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 2; Widdicombe, 1998: 197; Cerulo, 1997: 387). For example, Butler (1990) explains how gender identity is constructed by repeating certain social actions that are commonly understood to be its manifestation. The performance is steered by models of gender identities that are available within certain historical and socio-cultural circumstances. As the performance consists of sequences of actions, it enables the introduction of new elements and therefore change.

A number of approaches focus on various aspects of constructing identities. One of the examples is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the social power asymmetries that are reflected and reproduced in the interactions. Foucault (e.g. 1980; 1989), who described how the relationship between knowledge and power works to shape the social order and its inequalities, is a particularly influential theorist in the CDA-oriented studies. However, CDA is not a homogeneous school with a fixed set of methodological tools; rather, these are selected for each specific work (Zotzman and O'Regan, 2016: 114; van Dijk, 2001: 352–355). CDA, as van Dijk (2001: 352) describes it, is:

[A] type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.

Identity is an important concept in CDA. As Zotzman and O'Regan (2016: 124) explain:

The concept of identity is of interest to CDA because it is an essential part of a social situation that is problematic, for instance when individuals or groups of people are under threat from discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion.

Similarly to other constructionist approaches, CDA conceptualises identity as a discursive phenomenon. Importantly, it draws attention to the fact that individuals do not enter the discourse on equal terms, which means that they do not enjoy equal access to linguistic, cultural, economic or other resources. These resources are restricted by available discourses about, or ways of representing, social groups that are produced and reproduced at different levels of society and in different social spheres, e.g. the media, education and politics. The domination of certain groups may be authorised by laws, rules, norms, habits or general consensus. CDA aims at exposing and explaining problematic social practices to initiate their change. As CDA focuses on social and political issues, it is interested in identity from a wider sociohistorical perspective rather than the process of constructing individual identities as such – although the phenomenon of identity itself is observed at the micro-discursive level (Zotzman and O'Regan, 2016: 113–120; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 45; van Dijk, 2001: 353–355).

The idea of a fluid, fragmented, decentralised and discursively constructed identity gained particular popularity in postmodernist research, which takes a deconstructive perspective inspired by Derrida (e.g. 1987) towards social meaning, language and identity. Instead of conceptualising a world divided between accepted or dominant discourses and discourses that are excluded or dominated, postmodernism promotes the interplay of multiple competing viewpoints that challenge and complement one another. In this context, individuals construct their identities by continually making sense of these conflicting 'ways of knowing' and therefore choosing between a variety of 'ways of being'. As a result, people are never unambiguously powerful or powerless, but positioned across a range of competing discourses (Baxter, 2016: 43–44, 47; Cerulo, 1997: 391–392).

Postmodernism is interested in social aspect of new technologies, globalisation and multiculturalism. Common access to worldwide events and people enables experiencing multiple realities linked with the expansion of 'hybrid', 'in-between' or 'border' identities. Postmodernism frames identities as defined by leisure rather than occupation, as it provides a better source for excitement and self-enhancement, which is also linked with the importance of 'lifestyle' and 'the consumption of

goods' in identity construction under late Western capitalism (Beinhoff and Rasinger, 2016: 572–576; Doudaki, 2012: 13; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 22; Ott, 2003: 64; Kernan and Domzal, 2000: 79–81; Widdicombe, 1998: 204–205). As Doudaki (2012: 14) puts it: 'Consumption allows for a constant game of creativity, expression, invention, and reinvention of do-it-yourself (DIY) identity.' The role of media in identity formation has also gained attention. For example, Doudaki (2012) and Ott (2003) present how identities might be shaped by popular TV shows such as *Sex and the City* and *The Simpsons*. These programmes do not just deconstruct and reconstruct postmodern identities, but also offer specific models of identities and strategies for how to construct them (Doudaki, 2012: 5; Ott, 2003: 58).

2. Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology (EM), which I am using as my analytical framework, shares general ideas about the constructed character of identity with the constructionist approach, but has a unique quality that it gives voice to the language users and shows their perspective and understanding of their communicational situation. While theory-informed constructionism aims at revealing general 'models and principles' that shape social relationships, EM focuses on how individuals manage their identities in the current interaction. It is a purely empirical approach; it does not impose any theoretical hypotheses onto the data to realise certain research agendas. For example, it does not assume any power relations until they emerge in a particular interaction, rather than seeing them as inscribed *a priori* in every interaction (Baxter, 2016: 46; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 49–85; van Dijk, 2001: 96; Widdicombe, 1998: 201–202). This quality of EM is important to the present study, which aims to demonstrate how speakers themselves construct the relationship between names and identity.

EM, developed by sociologist Harold Garfinkel, is based on his observation of the interactive character of social life and of people's functioning in it. Garfinkel (1967: vii) explains the nature of ethnomethodological enquiry thus:

Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-

all-practical-purposes, i.e., ‘accountable’, as organizations of commonplace everyday activities.

According to EM, any social fact or phenomenon is collectively accomplished by the actions and interactions of a society’s members. This process is ongoing and reflexive: people’s everyday activities are at the same time the way they manifest their understanding of the world and the way they make sense of it in an observable and analysable way. In other words, people function in the world through interactions: this is how we understand the reality, our place in it and relationships with others, and any other encountered phenomena (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 36; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 1). As Watson (1994: 406–410) puts it, the interactants have ‘considerable skills ... in constituting the taken-for-granted world within which they operate’. The goal of EM is to make those skills visible by studying ‘how people, in the course of their everyday lives, constitute the world as a recognizable state of affairs’.

What is characteristic of EM is that it takes no stance in respect to the ontological nature of reality and does not map any specific model of interpretation onto the research data. EM researchers ‘do not want to treat people as informants, nor do they want to interpret what people say, still less speculate on the hidden forces that make them say it’ (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 1). Instead, EM takes the participants’ perspective and focuses solely on what is being done in the particular interaction and what is relevant to the interactants, while rejecting any theoretical preconceptions (Schegloff, 1992; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 51). EM can be described as a bottom-up approach, in contrast with (for example) CDA. This and other top-down approaches tend to begin with their own presuppositions, then look for evidence to confirm them. They therefore impose the analyst’s theoretical problems onto the producers of communication. As a result they replace the interactants’ understanding of reality with their own version of reality, judging and disagreeing with the participants of the analysed communicative situation, but missing what is actually happening (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 8–9, 37; Watson, 1994: 411–414, 418). It can thus be said that ethnomethodology observes the participants’ own ‘sense-making processes’ rather than those of the researchers, and the ‘practical, everyday concerns’ rather than ‘exogenous theoretical concerns’ (Watson, 1994: 421–422). While the

theoretical accounts distance themselves from reality to see what is going on objectively, ethnomethodologists take the insider's viewpoint (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 49–51; Garfinkel, 1967: viii).

In the process of constructing social reality, identity plays a crucial role. It is 'a strategic concept in addressing the relationship between individuals and society' (Widdicombe, 1998: 191). While other constructionist accounts may theorise about the ontological nature of identity, EM treats it as a members' phenomenon; it is real as much as is considered real by those who use it. EM does not explain linguistic behaviours based on theories referring to the oppression of certain social groups, but focuses on the participants' understanding and negotiation of who they are in relation to each other. Thus, identities are embedded in current interactions and in the routine of everyday life rather than in abstract discourses, and are constructed in a way that is intelligible to the direct audience. The aim of ethnomethodological analysis is to observe what strategies are used to construct and co-construct one or another identity, and how identities are made relevant within the interaction (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 1–2; Widdicombe, 1998: 202–203; Watson, 1994: 415–417). The relevance of an identity in the interaction can be demonstrated by revealing the consequences that a reference to this identity, or its emergence, has for the interaction. Thus, the fact that interaction participants notice that their interlocutors might, for example, be identified in terms of age, gender, etc., does not mean that this automatically affects the course of the interaction (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 70; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 2–4; Zimmerman, 1998: 90–91; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992: 192).

Since language, especially talking, is the main tool of interaction, talk is the main source of data for EM studies. It is also important that the research data derives from naturally occurring interactions, such as face-to-face conversations or phone calls. Other types of data, such as interviews, fieldnotes or experiments, are less reliable as a research material: they do not reflect authentic language use and can be affected by the researcher's perception and interpretation (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 57–58; Hester and Eglin, 1997: 1–2).

To sum up, EM is a particularly suitable research framework for the present study. It conceptualises identity as constructed, which is in line with how identity can be seen based on observations of the naming practices (p. 68). It also meets our two postulates (set up in fact by García-Ramírez, 2010: 12–13) about producing reliable evidence regarding the meaning of names:

1. As it restrains from theorising and takes the perspective of competent members of the society (Watson, 1994: 424) who use language for their own practical purposes in everyday situations, it directly matches the postulate that a reliable study into name usage must be based on observations of how they are used by competent speakers (pp. 39, 68).
2. EM-based research also meets the second requirement about ‘actual language use’ (García-Ramírez, 2010: 12–13). It is based on naturally occurring interactions, which constitute a more reliable source of research data (pp. 30, 33, 68) than, for example, experiments (such as in cognitive studies presented by García-Ramírez, 2010) where the setup of communicative situation is artificial, or interviews where data might be manipulated by the choice of questions.

2.1. Ethnomethodology in CMC

EM constitutes an appropriate approach to study CMC. In both cases, language is the centre of activity: in CMC in terms of production, in EM as a research material. Moreover, CMC provides research data that constitutes a truly ‘naturally-occurring data’. Text-based CMC does not require transcription, which could potentially result in some degree of researcher influence. The researcher also has a chance to access the data in an ‘authentic’ way, namely, as a *lurker*. This constitutes a truly participant-observer viewpoint as well as solves the problem of the ‘observer’s paradox’, where the participants’ awareness of the researcher’s presence might affect the data.

We can say that the computer as a medium of communication may constitute a milestone in EM research. While the invention of the portable tape recorder enabled the pioneers in EM, such as Harvey Sacks, to record and collect the research

material, CMC provides virtually unlimited access to data that is natural and unaffected. In addition, in asynchronous communication, where interactions are stored, the data can be revisited (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015: 6; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 253).

3. Virtual identity

While according to EM, language is the main means of identity construction, in CMC, where the cues that are provided by our bodies in face-to-face interactions are typically absent online, language is particularly important.

At the early stage of academic interest, it was expected that CMC participants would make use of this lack of audiovisual cues, and construct identities independent of the offline reality. This could, for example, neutralise social differences and therefore enable less powerful groups or individuals to participate equally in domains where they would usually be disadvantaged. The supposedly anonymous character of CMC was expected to eliminate prejudice based on appearance (e.g. age, race, attractiveness) by making the first impression ‘intellectual’, and in general to escape restrictions characteristic of embodied everyday reality and perhaps to some extent redefine interpersonal relationships (Herring and Stoerger, 2014: 567; Danet et al., 1997; Githens, 1996; Turkle, 1995).

Research findings do not seem to confirm these expectations. It has been demonstrated that virtual reality is constructed on the basis of socio-cultural experience that the users acquired offline. This includes transferring the ideas and models of identities (Herring and Stoerger, 2014: 571; Stommel and Koole, 2010; Baruch and Popescu, 2008; Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008; Stommel, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2006; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 268; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004; Tynes et al., 2004; Scheidt, 2001; Githens, 1996). Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 250) have observed, for example, that in CMC ‘very familiar identities are performed, taken from romance, fairytale, legend and mainstream sci-fi (...), revealing an obsession with the visibility and maintenance of traditional hegemonic gender roles’ (2006: 248), and that ‘even gender crossing/passing is still strongly binary in its orientation and essential in its themes and performances.’

3.1. Identities on RuNet

RuNet unites users from Russia, former Soviet republics, and the diaspora all over the world, which makes it a culturally complex environment. The introduction of the Internet in Russian-speaking society in the 1990s coincided with the transformation of the political system and accompanied its shift from the isolation created by Soviet ideology and practice to exposure and confrontation with international influences, globalisation and commercialisation (Schmidt and Teubener, 2006: 17).

As Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008: 254) states, identities in CMC are constructed in the context of the ‘intersection among the globalizing nature of the Internet, the influence of national cultures, and the local norms of each individual room’. This is not to say that all these spheres will be made relevant in each communication performed or to put them forward as a format of interpretation, but rather to point them out as possible resources that may or may not be referred to.

These factors have been demonstrated as relevant in the case of identity construction on RuNet, as shown by a number of studies into various aspect of Russian CMC. The socio-cultural and political background of the introduction and development of the Internet in the Russian-speaking world has been described by Schmidt et al. (2006), who explore certain interrelations between offline and online identity expressions. Guseinov (2014) has compiled a selection of articles edited by Akhmetova and Belikov that present interrelationships between contemporary Russian as well as the languages of some ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation and new information technologies. Gorham et al.’s (2014) edited work includes studies into the history of the Russian Internet, examples of Internet environments (from the blogosphere and social networks) and linguistic phenomena, such as ‘padonkian language’³⁵ and ‘translit’³⁶ as well as certain issues related to literature and politics. We can also find some works on other types of Internet environments; for example, Buras and Krongauz (2007) present business language online via the example of corporate

³⁵ Explained on pp. 179–181.

³⁶ Explained on p. 185.

websites, while Zalizniak and Mikaelyan (2006) analyse the language of email correspondence. A particular account on the history of RuNet has been presented by Gorny (2006), namely the development of creative forms and their correlations with wider sociocultural context, including ‘virtual persona’³⁷ as a creative genre, collective creativity as a community-building mechanism in Russian Live Journal, and joking as a representation of modern folklore. Sidorova (2006) presents characteristics of the language on RuNet, as well as how it compares to offline language and to the linguistic behaviours of other linguo-cultural settings. Trofimova (2009) also provides a thorough account of Russian on the Internet, covering its grammar, style and function, while Nikiporets-Takigawa (2010) focuses on Russian-speaking forums for the Australian, British and Japanese diaspora. Berdicevskis (2013), on the other hand, provides diachronic analysis of language change in Russian CMC. Certain linguistic phenomena, such as English borrowings (Gorbunova, 2011 and 2010; Dunn, 2011) or ‘padonkian language’ (Kukulin, 2016; Oliynyk, 2015; Berdicevskis, 2013: 186-199; Goriunova, 2006; Guseinov, 2005 and 2000), are particularly noticeable in the literature. Finally, Zvereva (2012) presents how these linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds are incorporated into locally constructed identities.

4. Membership categorisation analysis

Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) is a methodological approach developed on the basis of the EM theoretical framework.

Before presenting a more detailed characterisation of MCA, it is important to indicate the general nature of this methodological concept. As Fitzgerald and Housley (2015: 6) highlight, MCA cannot be considered an established methodology with a fixed set of methodological tools ready to apply to research material. Rather, it provides ‘a collection of observed practices employed by members’ to guide

³⁷ Understood as a fictitious character created by a person or group of people (Gorny, 2006: 194). It may be worth noting that such phenomenon is not without precedence, especially in the history of literature where fictitious authors and various types of alter-egos have not been unusual. In Russian literature, arguably the most well known was Koz’ma Prutkov, brought to life by Aleksei Tolstoi and the Zhemchuzhnikov brothers (Masanov, 1969: 227–230).

development of the specific ‘analytic mentality’ while performing data examination so that the researcher focuses on people’s own ‘ways and methods’ to ‘orient, invoke and negotiate social category based knowledge when engaged in social action’. Day (2010: 1) describes MCA as a:

means of explicating the practically oriented, commonsensical, and cultural reasoning of people as they go about their social lives. In particular it focuses on the recognizability of people as certain sorts of people or, more specifically, people as certain sorts of members of society, and how this recognizability is a resource for members in their dealings with each other.

And, as Stokoe (2012: 279) explains, MCA involves ‘analysis of constructed reality; of culture, identity and morality; of inference and meaning’ in the ‘ethnomethodological spirit’.

The idea of MCA first appeared in Sacks’s early work, including lectures and publications, in the mid-1960s to early 1970s. Sacks has observed that a crucial role in people’s understanding of the world is organising it, including participants, into categories. To facilitate analysis of this phenomenon of categorisation he developed a tool called the Membership Categorisation Device (MCD) that comprises two elements: one or more collections of categories and rules of application.

The idea is that people are grouped into classes or collections of categories that are perceived as belonging together. For example, male/female or teacher/doctor/lawyer belong together, whereas male/teacher do not. MCD ‘family’ includes categories: ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘aunt’, ‘sister’, ‘son’ and other. Categories may belong to numbers of MCDs, e.g. the category ‘baby’ might belong to the MCDs ‘family’, ‘stage of life’ or ‘terms of endearment’ (Stokoe, 2012: 281). Individuals also might be ascribed to a number of categories. Each of these categories enables ‘activating alternative bodies of commonsense knowledge, inference, perception, etc.’. According to Schegloff (2007a: 467-469), the significance of membership categories lies in their following properties:

- Inference-richness: membership categories are ‘the store house and the filing system for the common-sense knowledge’ about what people are like, how they behave, etc. A person taken to be a member of a certain category is a

‘presumptive representative of the category’, meaning that what is ‘known’³⁸ about the category is automatically ascribed to this person.

- Protection against induction: if an individual perceived as a member of a specific category does not comply with the common ‘knowledge’ about members of this category, people tend to see this person as a different, exceptional or defective member of the category rather than revise their knowledge. As a member of the same culture, and thus familiar with its commonsense knowledge, such person is also aware of their ‘inadequacy’.
- Category-bound activities: one of the elements of ‘category-based common-sense knowledge’ are ‘forms of conduct’ associated with relevant categories as particularly characteristic of their members. For example, although members of various categories could be ‘crying’, this activity is particularly characteristic of the category ‘baby’ in the MCD ‘stages of life’.

The category-bound features might take various forms: namely, they may come in the form of activities, predicates, rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes, states of mind, behaviours, competencies, etc. that are expected of members of specific categories. Persons labelled ‘cabin crew’, for instance, which might include a flight attendant, purser (chief flight attendant), first-class steward and so on, are expected to be polite, knowledgeable about aircraft safety, well-travelled, and so on. And this can be reversed: if you look and behave in a certain way you might be taken to be a member of a certain category. MCA is interested in how membership categories, membership categorisation devices and category predicates are used in everyday activities, and aims at formally describing the procedures that are employed by interactants on each specific occasion (Stokoe, 2012: 281; Fitzgerald et al., 2009: 47; Schegloff, 2007a: 466-474; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 65; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 2-3; Hester and Eglin, 1997: 3-5, 46).

³⁸ Just as a reminder, we are talking from the perspective of the population member/participant. As Schegloff (2007a: 469) explains:

I say ‘known’ rather than ‘believed,’ and refer to ‘(common-sense) knowledge’ rather than ‘stereotype’ or ‘prejudice’ because, for members, this has the working status of ‘knowledge,’ whatever its scientific status or moral/political character may be.

4.1. Membership categories in CMC

Similarly to their offline counterparts, entities that appear on the Internet are categorisable. Some of these categories are medium-specific, such as moderator, newbie, flamer, lamer, lurker and flooder. They also have sets of attributes attached to them. For example, a moderator might be entitled to issue reminders of the rules and warnings, have a right to ban a disobedient participant, or have an obligation to protect the users' comfort (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 266-167). Again, the practical realisation of these categories is in interaction. For example, in the work of Stommel and Koole (2010) and Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 268-277) we can observe two concepts of a 'newbie' in two different environments: in a forum for people suffering from eating disorders and on a 'graphic novel' message board. For example, in the forum the newcomers are not just welcomed but also confronted with requirements that the members must meet, while in the message board such request is not made.

Categories familiar from the offline settings are also brought to the Internet; they might be used as models of collective identities or claimed by individuals for themselves. For example, Baruch and Popescu (2008) present how Turkish students construct collective identities in relation to 'the Cyprus issue' based on the strategy of contrasting the Turkish 'us' (heroic, selfless, responsible) and the Turkish Cypriot 'them' (vulnerable, selfish, betrayers, lost sons of the same nation), whereas in the above-mentioned work of Stommel and Koole (2010) individuals claim the identity of the 'sufferer' by 'orientation to normative expectations', i.e. describing symptoms and behaviours related to the condition.

5. Username and identity

Usernames have been demonstrated to play an important role in identity enactment and assessment. The functioning of usernames in relation to users' identities has been conceptualised in a number of ways. The general idea that unites these approaches might be described, following Sidorova (2006: 93), as a usernames being a beginning and a kernel of linguistic identity on the Internet.

According to Bechar-Israeli (1995), usernames are ‘a kind of mini-ritual in which, each time participants log on, they declare their entrance into the state of play’ and ‘the means by which others recognize us and interact with us’. This study revealed that usernames are ‘the key to making contacts and friends’, which is why, although they can be changed easily, participants tend to build up their virtual personality and reputation on a stable username.

Danet (1995) and Danet et al. (1997) compared usernames to masks that participants ‘wear’ to enact the roles of their ‘personae’, disguise real identities, attract attention and generate specific reactions.

Bays (1998) proposes that usernames take on the role of a ‘face’. Based on Goffman’s notions of *frame* and *face*, Bays explains how cognitive structures of presence are constructed in CMC through strategies and conventions that can be compared to those used in offline interaction. In this process, usernames playing a role of ‘face’ constitute ‘a symbolic locus for presence’ that makes communication possible; they also contribute to the success of communication, as they substitute to some extent for audiovisual cues that generate a first impression.

Lev and Lewinsky (2004) refer to Goffman’s (1959) theories of symbolic interaction and dramaturgical perspective. The first of these theories proposes that humans communicate on the basis of symbolic representations rather than actual properties or qualities, which explains the role of names as symbolic representations of interacting persons. Furthermore, people communicate by enacting certain roles in relation to specific values, norms, conventions, etc. that are meaningful for the interacting parties. Names, as elements of the performance, are ascribed meaning and scanned for information about the named person, which helps to outline a context that must be adhered to in order to act adequately. Lev and Lewinsky have demonstrated that images based on usernames have influenced interlocutors’ reactions, including their decision to undertake interaction.

Hagström’s (2012: 87) study also confirms that usernames may generate impressions and provoke certain reactions. For example, according to some participants in *World of Warcraft*, the world’s biggest online role-playing game:

Nonsense names, such as *Hgrwhsjx*, or names taken from real life objects, such as *Lampshade*, are considered stupid and ruining the ‘feeling’ of the game. [...] As a consequence, [informants] sometimes avoid to group, chat or interact with these players.

Del-Teso-Craviotto’s (2008) study demonstrates that in dating chatrooms usernames are employed to represent participants’ bodies. In dating chatrooms gender identity is particularly important because the understanding of sexual desire is typically linked to a specified gender. Manifestation of gender identity usually takes place through the body. As there are no pre-existing bodies in CMC, on which the identities might be constructed, they are created, co-constructed and negotiated between the participants by other means available on the Internet. The first steps in this process are the choice of the room (typically in terms of age and sexual orientation³⁹) and the creation of a username; both of these acts are vital for further interaction because these are the ways in which participants recognise each other as members of gender and sexual categories.

Stommel (2007: 144-145) conceptualises usernames as ‘emblems’⁴⁰. An emblem is any perceivable sign or thing that somebody reads as indicating identity or, in other words, images of personhood. If an emblem is widely recognisable, i.e. many people attach the same social meaning to it, it becomes an ‘enregistered emblem’ – in contrast to situational emblems that emerge and disappear during the course of interaction. Enregistered emblems convey stereotypical images of persons (such as female/male, upper-class, lawyer) through which individuals can be allocated enregistered identities. While the emergent emblems are bound with a particular text, stereotypes circulate in a decontextualised form and shift from one text to another – although their meaning might be modified or altered by the specific context in which they appear. Usernames can be considered enregistered emblems. They are selected before any interaction takes place; they are fixed and all future interlocutors will

³⁹ As observed by Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008: 254), these are the most frequently used criteria to divide dating chatrooms (e.g. ‘Bisexuals’, ‘Thirties Love’, ‘Gay 40s’), although occasionally religion and ethnicity are also important (e.g. ‘Jewish Singles’, ‘Asian Singles’).

⁴⁰ Based on Agha, A. (2007) *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

normally refer to them. They automatically appear with every post to indicate who wrote it, thus they do not appear and disappear or change depending on the text.

Androutsopoulos (2006: 525) has also described usernames as static, ‘emblematic’ elements of CMC, and as ‘acts of self-presentation that are designed for and displayed to, rather than negotiated with, an audience’ in contrast to conversation that is produced on a regular basis.

Research from the audience’s perspective has also confirmed the communicative potential of usernames. Heisler and Crabill (2006) applied uncertainty reduction theory (URT), as proposed by Berger and Calabrese (1975), to investigate perceptions of usernames created for fictitious email addresses, in terms of demography, productivity and personality. URT concerns the development of interpersonal relationships and focuses on their initial stage: interaction between strangers. Its key hypothesis is that when strangers meet, their primary concern is to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability about the behaviour of their interactants by looking for, and ‘making sense’ of, available cues. Heisler and Crabill’s results suggest that email names (especially descriptive ones such as *stinkybug* and *sober4alilbit*, as opposed to plain ones like *ai4773*), serve as an important source of information and enhance a desire for interaction by creating an impression of predictability. It was found that email names were ascribed demographic information such as gender (74%), age (65%) and race (56%) as well as hobbies, performance at work, or interpersonal qualities, e.g. ‘This guy is a PLAYER! Stay away from him!’, ‘she’s probably a drunk—with no self respect’, or ‘This person is NOT normal. With an email like this, he’s definitely mental’ (Heisler and Crabill, 2006: 128).

5.1. Gender identity

Usernames as a strategy of gender identity performance and assessment seem to have generated the most attention compared to other categories of people or aspects of individual identity (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008; Stommel, 2007; Herring and Martinson, 2004; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004; Herring, 2003; Scheidt, 2001; Desser, 2000; Herring, 1996). Also, from the viewpoint of the audience according to Heisler

and Crabill (2006: 128), gender appears to be the characteristic most frequently ascribed to usernames. This does not come as a surprise, and its explanation can be found in both ethnomethodology and name study.

5.1.1. Gender identity in ethnomethodology

The idea that gender identity is not something that we have but what we do, accomplish or perform can be traced to Garfinkel's (1967) case study of Agnes, an intersex person, and her performance of female identity. He analysed and demonstrated how the sex status, typically a taken-for-granted state, is socially constructed and individually enacted, and by what tools and strategies it is produced. According to Garfinkel, a typical adult perceives the human population as coming in 'two sexes and only two sexes', male and female. This strictly dichotomised image of population 'is not decided as a matter of biological, medical, urological, sociological, psychiatric, or psychological fact', but is continually re-constructed and maintained through 'motivated compliance' with this image as a 'legitimate order'. The adult members of population perceive this order as real and take for granted the correspondence of their own and others' identities with it.

There are specific 'insignia' that are used for identification. Some of them, such as having particular sex organs, are regarded as essential, and are socially used to justify the order as a natural fact, and therefore as morally correct. In accordance with this, people are ascribed certain feelings, activities, membership obligations, attributes, actions, relationships, etc. that are considered appropriate for each category. Thus, for an adult member of a population, in a 'good society' there are only persons of either one or the other sex, namely, 'only *natural* males and *natural* females' with 'naturally' appropriate sets of attributes (Garfinkel, 1967: 122-123). The task of ethnomethodology is to observe the mechanisms of functioning of these categories as natural and normal across particular situations and events, to see how the 'normative conceptions' about what women and men can and should be are identified, performed, negotiated and maintained (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 38; Stokoe, 2006: 469; Zimmerman, 1992; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

5.1.2. Concepts of femininities and masculinities

Men and women are often perceived as ‘naturally’ different within the following fields of everyday reality (Kliuchko, 2010: 77):

- Psychological qualities and personal traits attributed to men and women: ‘active-creative’ characteristics are attributed to masculinity (activity, dominance, self-confidence, aggressiveness, logical thinking and leadership ability), whereas ‘passive-reproductive’ (dependence, solicitude, anxiety, low self-esteem, emotionality) – to femininity.
- Family and professional roles: mother and housewife are considered the most significant social roles for women, who are assigned to the private sphere of life (home, children and responsibility for interrelations in the family), whereas social life, professional success and breadwinning are the lot of men.
- Differences in work: women’s work should be in the sphere of doing and serving (such as retail, health care or education), while creative and management work is natural for men.

‘Common knowledge’ is a powerful source of reference to shape a social order. The information and ‘facts’ that it contains are taken as reliable and obvious to the extent that they might be circulated by some renowned scholars. For example, Kolesov (2004: 217), in the following excerpt, ascribes an attribute of ‘loving diminutives’ to the category ‘woman’:

Women love various forms of superlative degree as well as words with diminutive-endearing suffixes. When a man worked with a typewriter – it was a typing machine (машина [mashina]). At the beginning of the 20th century he was replaced by a ‘typing lady’ – and the machine turned into ‘little typing machine’ (машинка [mashinka]). All the old Russian words like чаша [chasha] ‘cup, chalic’, миса [misa] ‘bowl’, ложка [lozhitsa] spoon, таз [taz] ‘basin’, тарелка [tarelka] ‘plate’ (...), it was namely a woman who in her speech successively changed them into чашка [czashka], чашечка [chashechka], миска [miska], ложечка [lozhechka], тазик [tazik], тарелочка [tarelochka].

He does not mention a single source to support his statements about the use of diminutives by men and women in general or about the process of diminutivisation in

the case of these specific words. He also does not frame the link between women and diminutives as a socio-cultural question, but presents it as if fondness for these kinds of expressions was natural for women. However, by referring to ‘historical facts’ and, indirectly, to his own authority by publishing these words as a professor of philology and a specialist in the history of language and culture, he makes them look valid and reliable.

As a result, certain categories might be *hearably* ‘male’ or ‘female’ (Stokoe, 2006: 488). For example, we can say that the category ‘nurse’ is hearably female while the category ‘engineer’ will be hearably male because of associated characteristics that are commonly ascribed to males and females.

5.1.3. Gender and MCA

According to the membership categorisation, gender belongs to a Pn-adequate collection. This means that the categories in that collection are applied to any member of any population. According to Schegloff (2007a: 468), ‘It is a fact of major importance that there are at least two Pn-adequate devices in every language/culture we know.’ Age is another example of such category in European cultures (Schegloff, 2007a: 467). It is worth reiterating here that, as much as gender categorisation work is produced as natural, ordinary and taken-for-granted, and therefore might be invisible (Stokoe, 2006: 488), this does not mean that gender or any other Pn-adequate categories will be made relevant in every interaction. The fact that interactants acknowledge each other’s categorisibility does not mean that they will orient to these categories in interaction. A classic example of the opposite approach represents the work of Tannen (e.g. 1990), according to whom any communication can be analysed as gendered simply because it is produced by men and women⁴¹.

⁴¹ As well as providing an example of ‘digging’ in people’s minds for explanations of their performance, e.g. in Tannen (1987: 256), she points that a proper analysis of conversation is ‘not available by observing surface of talk; it is a matter of interpretation’, and that certain linguistic behaviours are motivated by ‘basic human needs’ (1987: 253-254), which additionally implies that certain linguistic behaviours are ‘naturally’ motivated. This opposes the main points of EM: that linguistic behaviour is social and that research should focus on what is perceptible.

5.1.4. Names and gender

Gender is the feature that is the most frequently indicated by names. For example, in 52 out of the 60 societies sampled by Alford (1987: 66) names were gender indicative, and some state regulations do not allow the bestowing of male names on females and vice versa (e.g. Brylla, 2009: 176). Thus, it can be said that the social construction of gender identity often⁴² begins with a naming act, and in many societies names serve as an important tool of gender categorising.

Names are not only a source of direct information on the gender of the named person. The naming customs, both institutionalised and informal, may reveal how gender identities are constructed and perceived within cultures and societies, through both the selection of names as well as the way they are used. Korean females, for example, use their personal names only until puberty. Later in life they are addressed exclusively in reference to their roles of sisters, daughters, wives and mothers, which suggests that ‘the adult woman’s identity is nothing more than the sum of her various familial roles’ (Alford, 1987: 56).

American naming practices are also (or at least were in the late 1980s) indicative of gender identity differences. It has been revealed, for example, that in the United States boys are named after relatives much more often than girls, especially in higher social classes and particularly the firstborn ones. This might indicate that males are perceived as, and encouraged to be, ‘symbolic carriers of continuity and prestige of the family’ (Alford, 1987: 131). This, in turn, results in higher name reoccurrence for boys than for girls, as well as a response from the named: boys themselves also tend to prefer common names over unusual ones (Alford, 1987: 150). In naming girls, on the other hand, parents more often pay attention at aesthetics of names and are more likely to give them unusual names, which might be interpreted as pointing to the importance of females’ attractiveness (Alford, 1987: 132).

⁴² However, gender-neutral naming does not have to indicate gender equality (e.g. vom Bruck, 2006: 230).

In his investigation, Alford (1987: 65-68) has observed three methods of name sex-typing across the cultures:

- By semantic meaning – when the name makes a clear reference to male or female roles, activities or traits; e.g. girls are often given ‘pretty’ names (referring to birds, flowers, butterflies) whereas boys are bestowed ‘strong’ and ‘aggressive’ ones (e.g. warlike)
- By a suffix or prefix that indicates the person’s gender
- By convention – when certain names are conventionally applied to males and different ones to females

Names might also reveal cultural differences in concepts of gender identities. For example, Germanic anthroponymy in general tends to lean towards stereotypically masculine characteristics, expressed in numerous references to war symbols in both male and female names. On the contrary, Turkic names display a strong polarisation between masculine and feminine qualities fixed in names: names for males refer to high social status, strength and wealth, whereas those for females mostly to appearance (Kirilina, 1998).

5.1.4.A. Gender in Russian names

Russian names are gender indicative, and are normally applied to males or females by convention. The semantic meaning of the vocabulary they derived from is typically not transparent, apart from a few, e.g. Liubov’ ‘love’, Vera ‘faith’ and Nadezhda ‘hope’. In theory, parents are free to choose any name for their child, including, for example, diminutive forms of names or novel formations (for example, a girl was named Rossiia, ‘Russia’, in 2004 in Nizhnii Tagil), but in reality these cases are rather rare (Golomidova, 2005: 13). Novel formations, such as Ninel’ (f) – reversed ‘Lenin’ or Vladlen (m) – a contraction of Vladimir Lenin, were more frequent in the post-revolutionary period (Superanskaia, 2005: 67, 322). When female names are derived from the male ones, the female form is typically indicated by the suffix -a, e.g. Anastasii (m) – Anastasia (f), Evgenii (m) – Evgenia (f), or Feodor (m) – Feodora (f). In general, the majority of females’ names end with an ‘a’

sound (letters ‘a’ or ‘я’ [ia]) in their full form, and the majority of males’ names end with a consonant; however, there are exceptions, e.g. the male name Nikita or the female name Liubov’. Short and diminutive forms might be the same for both male and female variants of the name, such as *Sasha* for both Aleksandr and Aleksandra.

5.1.5. Gender identity construction in CMC

Gender studies on the Internet have a comparatively long tradition. The works have revealed that the production of the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’ as binary has been transferred to CMC, which can be observed in various linguistic features, communication styles, self-presentation strategies, etc. that tend to reflect ‘traditional gender patterns’ (e.g. Kapidzic and Herring, 2011; Herring and Paolillo, 2006).

For example, it appears that users who present maleness tend to dominate the discourse and typically control the topic by the style of communication that includes lengthy and/or frequent postings, self-promotion, and authoritative discourse that presents them as experts, as well as applying silencing and intimidating strategies such as put-downs, contentious assertions and sarcasm. In contrast, perceptibly female users seem more supportive and considerate of others. They more often express doubts and appreciation, apologise, ask questions and make suggestions rather than rigid statements (Herring and Stoerger, 2014; Herring, 2003; Githens, 1996; Herring, 1996).⁴³ Gender cues might also influence perceptions and reactions to the produced communication. For example, Armstrong and McAdams (2009) have discovered that informational blogs of male authors were judged as more credible than those of females, which might serve as an example of reproduction of category qualities of males and females. Additionally, individuals displaying female identities seem disfavoured as interlocutors: they not only post fewer messages and rarely control the topic in mixed-gendered communication, but receive fewer responses as

⁴³ A tendency observed ‘when considered over aggregate populations of users, controlling for variables such as age, topic, and the synchronicity of the medium’. Additionally, extreme behaviours are represented almost exclusively by only one of the genders: extremely adversarial ‘flaming’ almost always by males, while the greatest supportiveness is almost always provided by females (Herring, 1996: 118–121; 2001: 5). For a comprehensive review of the literature on gender dynamics online in the last 30 years, see Herring and Stoerger (2014).

well – except in synchronous chatrooms where they tend to be ‘bombarded’ with unwelcome advances. They are also disproportionately the targets of unprovoked aggression, and of sexual harassment (Herring and Stoerger, 2014: 571; Herring, 2003; Githens, 1996). Also gender identities constructed online often seem schematic and refer to attributes associated with models of stereotypical men and women (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008; Stommel, 2007; Scheidt, 2001).

5.1.5.A. Usernames and gender identity

Usernames play a crucial role in construction, authentication and assessment of gender identity online. Although this is a Pn-adequate collection and any member of any population is supposed to be ascribed to one or another gender category, in some contexts gender categorisation seems particularly important.

On dating sites, ‘gender’ might be considered to function as an ‘omnirelevant’ MCD, because it constitutes the key ground for communication. Fitzgerald and Housley (2015: 15) describe omnirelevant MCDs as relevant throughout the whole interaction. They present an example of the radio phone-in programme where the categories of ‘host’ and ‘caller’ are omnirelevant, as they remain relevant throughout the show, which can be demonstrated by the fact that they operate at the organisational level, namely, they determine certain behaviours of the participants. They can be observed as relevant for the participants when participants perform actions that are determined by them, e.g. a ‘host’ introduces the topic of the programme and the ‘callers’ as well as invites them to speak.

Usernames in this case can be said to play a role of bodies that display attributes expected of one or another gender category to invite interest of desired type of interlocutors. For example, Del-Teso-Craviotto’s (2008) study on English- and Spanish-speaking dating chatrooms demonstrates that usernames are the primary linguistic means to claim, or validate, the participants’ identities as members of specific gender and sexual groups. Two types of attributes were most frequently indicated by naming: authenticity and attractiveness. The first feature, meaning that the displayed identities matched the age, gender and sexual orientation of the room, was often realised by following the ‘age/sex/location’ format, e.g. *TiO18Mad* ‘guy

18 Madrid', *MsGaPeach35* 'Ms Georgia Peach35'. Second, to render an attractive image, users often referred to stereotypically feminine or masculine physical attributes or other widely recognisable sexual associations: e.g. *LVNVCowboy*, *TRUEblonde821*, *SoftNSweetLips*, *DarrellRooster5*, *BIGBADBLUEDOG*.

Another group of users, for whom the issue of gender and sexuality might be of specific importance, are teenagers. Gender and sexuality is one of the major identity aspects that they are in the process of discovering and learning to perform. In addition, peer communication and media are two main sources of information about sex for adolescents (Subrahmanyam et al., 2004: 653-654; Scheidt, 2001).

Both Subrahmanyam et al. (2004) and Scheidt (2001) have observed patterns of naming among adolescents online with special attention to gender performance – although here, age rather than gender will constitute the omnirelevant MCD. Scheidt (2001) describes usernames as 'stand-ins for the participant' and the primary devices of gender identity construction. This study showed that adolescents performed their gender based on a limited array of attributes stereotypically ascribed to males (****CO-LEADA OF THA GANGSTA BOYZ****, *No limit soldier*) and females (*~\$~Prin(c)ess 'of the Night~\$~*, *Devil_babygrl_17*). Scheidt (2001) has also observed that females frequently identified as 'sex-objects' (*READY TO SCREW*, *2 HOT CHICKS*).

Subrahmanyam et al. (2004) have also observed that adolescents used their usernames to substitute for visually manifested aspects of identity, mainly gender. Participants self-categorised as males and females by using conventional names (*DEREK01*, *Jason26*, *Jeff443*) and terms commonly used to refer to males, i.e. boy, man and guy (*Nickman20*) or females, such as chick, babe and girl (*basketballgurl*, *cherrycolabebe*, *PrincessDabrat1980*). Many usernames drew upon stereotypical gender connotations: *ArmorCrewman20*, *TJHockeyGUY66*, *Babygiurl*, *Snowbunny*). Additionally, females often selected names with a sexualized and seductive quality (*Hotgurl*, *Hotgrl56Hot*, *Sugarlove*), while males took on a macho quality (*Jock*).

Gender identity may be constructed in combination with other categories. The researchers, whose foci were other categories than gender, also report a noticeable

correlation between gender performance and naming patterns. Androutsopoulos (2006) primarily focused on ethnicity and nationality on discussion forums addressed to Germany-based diaspora groups. He observed that ethnicity was often displayed in combination with gender, e.g. *PersianLady*, *prince of Persia*, *sexy_greekgirl*, *GreEk_Chica*, *greekgod19* (2006: 540). Also Tynes et al. (2004), who directed their attention to race and ethnicity in teenagers' chatrooms, discovered that usernames that referred to race and ethnicity also often indicated gender (*CrazyLatinaGirl*, *CaramelBabe*).

Another example of a study into a combination of gender identity with other membership categories in usernames is the examination of naming patterns in a forum for sufferers from eating disorders performed by Stommel (2007). In this forum, where approximately 97% of participants were females (2007: 146-147), several usernames referred to attributes recognisable as feminine and to those attributable to eating disorders. Stommel (2007) has also observed certain recurrent patterns in naming practices in referring to those features that form the following groups:

- Nature femininity, (e.g. *marienblume* 'daisy', **Schneeflocke** 'snow flake', *Lluvia* 'rain', *Schattenvoegelchen* 'small shadow bird').

One of the groups of usernames in Stommel's study refers to nature: to flora, fauna (small animals and flowers), and meteorology and astrology (rain, snow, stars and sky). In the European cultures, there is a shared idea of associating nature with femininity, which found for example its expression in the concept of 'mother nature'. These objects are also small or light, which can be stereotypically ascribed to femininity – first, because women are typically physically smaller than men, but also because it evokes harmless, vulnerable, 'insignificant', 'trivial' and 'less important' beings, which are common representations of femininity in theory and literature. 'Smallness' and 'lightness' can also be related to the anorexic and bulimic ideal of

thinness and weightlessness, which often is a goal and measure of success⁴⁴ (Stommel, 2007: 151-153).

- Childish femininity (e.g. *Dorie, lillifee79*)

References to cartoon and play figures can also be perceived as references to both feminine and anorexic attributes. Women have often been portrayed as childish, meaning that they are sweet and cute on one hand, and on the other immature and infantile; linguistically it is expressed for example in that women are much more often addressed as girls than men as boys. The wish not to be mature is also characteristic of eating disorders. For example, in puberty the attempt to ‘regain’ control over the changing body may express itself as a wish to ‘desexualise’ it: by ‘diminishing hips and breasts, and banishing her period, a girl denies essential aspects of adult femininity’ (Stommel, 2007: 155-157).

- Noble femininity (e.g. *Freya, hypathia, Kassioaiah, Salome, Aletheia*)

References to female mythological and historical figures evoke a different concept of femininity. These figures are associated with power, high status and achievements, and bring to mind images of dignified, gracious and intelligent persons. These references might be read as expression of high expectations that the sufferers often have of themselves, and the sense of strength and self-worth that they strive to achieve (Stommel, 2007: 157).

Taking the example of this forum, we can see how categories may share certain attributes, which also points to the importance of the specific context in constructing and reading the identities.

Gender might also be indicated by a gender-specific grammatical form or phonological feature of the username. As Stommel (2007: 146) explains: because German names ending in -a or -e are almost always female, while those ending in -n, -s or -d are predominantly male, a username’s ending may associate it with a specific

⁴⁴ Although anorexia does not seem to be about the body, as an anorexic ‘expresses with her body what she is unable to tell us with words’, the body facilitates its expression (Stommel, 2007: 141).

gender. For instance, the username ‘kareja’, which seems a novel formation (and thus has no semantic meaning⁴⁵) and is not a customary personal name, to a German speaker will seem female because it ends with an ‘a’.

In languages where certain speech parts are grammatically gendered, gender typing can be performed by choosing a male or female form. For example, Spanish speakers may use nouns and adjectives marked with the morphological endings -o (m) and -a (f), e.g. *gata00001* ‘female cat 00001’, *diablo23* ‘male devil 23’ (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008: 258). Nouns may also have a specific grammatical gender ascribed to them. For instance, in German **Schneeflocke** (‘snow flake’) is grammatically feminine, and thus may be associated with a female (Stommel, 2007: 147).

The gender-typing features can also be combined. For example, the grammatical gender of nouns may support the word’s connotations of femininity or masculinity. The username **Schneeflocke** is grammatically feminine and may also be read as feminine because of its attributes of softness, lightness, etc. (Stommel, 2007: 147).

Thus, CMC participants may use various strategies to create gender-indicative usernames, such as by their semantics, by using nouns indicating males or females (e.g. guy, lady, girl), by gender-typing conventional names as well as names of famous referent (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008: 258; Stommel, 2007: 154; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004: 656, 659; Scheidt 2001). I am now going to investigate gender-typing strategies in usernames gathered from the forum *Posidelki*, beginning with introducing the forum itself.

5.2. Forum *Posidelki*

A forum is an environment of asynchronous communication, where ‘individual contributions to a group are saved and distributed as they come in, which may be at any time and separated by any period of time’ (Crystal, 2006: 134).

⁴⁵ In fact, it might refer to a Greek settlement in Mount Athos, Karyes ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karyes_\(Athos\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karyes_(Athos))), which in some languages, e.g. Croatian, is called ‘Kareja’ (<http://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kareja>).

Studies that demonstrate relationships between usernames and identity typically present Internet sites addressed to specific types of users, or dedicated to a particular subject, or a particular purpose of communication. The forum *Posidelki* ‘gatherings’ is addressed to anyone who is able to communicate in Russian, and is not dedicated to any specific topic. In the first stage of my study, the analysis is performed on usernames only, while the second stage involves excerpts of conversations. The data comes from naturally occurring material and none of its elements has been arranged or affected by me.



Image 1. *Posidelki* home page

In *Posidelki*, participants find entertainment and advice in the form of discussions on various subjects such as health, interests, food, fashion, relationships and others, as well as questionnaires, jokes, games and competitions. Currently, there are some 1600 topics containing over 76000 posts that cover virtually anything from ‘how do you have your coffee’ to ‘what is your opinion on the death sentence’. The language of communication is Russian. Conversations are accessible to both registered and unregistered visitors but only registered users are allowed to participate in the

discussions. There are also private pages hidden from unregistered guests. There are 676 usernames registered on the forum at the moment.⁴⁶

Posidelki forum			
Forum	Тем	Сообщений	Последнее сообщение
 Отдых, туризм, путешествия Покажи свой город, расскажи о нём! Побывал на отдыхе? Поделись с нами.	26	552	Вот и лето 2015-07-11 00:26:54 - налогочка
 Учеба и работа	39	507	Учеба и работа. Всегда ли получается совмещать? 2015-03-29 22:16:07 - Katty
 Мир техники и Интернета Компьютеры, софт, электро-цифровая, аудио, видео, фото-техника а так же всемирная паутина	44	850	Последняя приобретенная техника 2014-11-09 20:56:10 - Пупсик
 Автомобили	17	156	Машина вашей мечты 2013-07-28 16:29:19 - Krasa
Хобби и увлечения			
Forum	Тем	Сообщений	Последнее сообщение
 Спорт Движение - это жизнь, все виды спорта, наши предпочтения, обсуждения матчей и чемпионатов мира	19	464	Сочи-2014. Олимпиада и Паралимпиада 2014-02-28 16:19:37 - Katty
 Музыка Всё о музыке, тексты песен, наши музыкальные предпочтения, различные направления в музыке, обсуждения артистов и музыкальных премий года	39	910	Песни которые заставляют плакать 2014-06-23 23:59:28 - Keisha
 Кино и TV Обсуждаем фильмы, кто что смотрел, передачи, шоу, любимые мультфильмы и все, что идет по телевизору и в кинотеатре вашего города	67	1031	Каналы ютуба 2014-07-31 12:15:40 - Keisha
 Графика Всё о фотопше, рисунки сделанные в фотопше, рамки, уроки фотопше, полезные ссылки на фотопше и так же картинки, аватарки и просто красивые фотографии	37	612	Граффити 2014-07-11 15:44:33 - Стрелкоза
 Психология Форум, в котором каждый может помочь друг другу советом. Обсуждение актуальных проблем, личности человека, его страхов, фобий и зависимостей.	23	523	Ходили к ясновидящим-магам-гадалкам? 2014-05-02 19:15:38 - Keisha

Image 2. *Posidelki* examples of topics


Upon registration, users create ‘profiles’ that display information about them. Username is the only obligatory element selected by the participant. Additionally, users may choose to reveal real names, date of birth, gender, location, ICQ identification, interests and any other information in the section ‘about myself’. Participants are also allowed space for additional information, which usually contains pictures, slogans, links, etc., and may select avatars – especially formatted pictures downloadable from the Internet. Apart from the participant-provided content, each profile automatically displays: status (depending on engagement in the forum users are categorised as newbies, participants, active participants, fellows, mates, friends, frequenters, old chaps, elite, banned, or – the default status for administration – moderator) as well as dates of registration, last visit and last activity, time spent on

⁴⁶ 30th December 2014

the forum, number of postings, 'respect points', 'positive points', number of rewards, and number of invitations.

Examples of profiles (Images 3-5):

The screenshot shows a forum profile for a user named John Warner. The profile is displayed in a light green box with an orange header. On the left, there is a user name 'John Warner' and a status 'Знакомый' (Acquainted). Below the name is a small image of a car. To the right, a list of statistics and details is shown in a table-like format. At the bottom, there is a signature: 'Lock, stock and two smoking barrels.'

Профиль: John Warner		
John Warner	Настоящее имя:	[Redacted]
Знакомый	Пол:	[Redacted]
	Возраст:	[Redacted]
	Местонахождение:	[Redacted]
	Зарегистрирован:	2010-11-17
	Приглашений:	0
	Провел на форуме:	9 часов 10 минут
	Уважение:	14
	Позитив:	5
	Интересы:	Автоэлектродело, Запорожцы, GTA SA, радиолампы, электроника, веб-дизайн
	Обо мне:	Злобный посткиллер на модер электрораздела.
	Сообщений:	88
	Последнее сообщение:	2013-08-06 10:03:06
	Последний визит:	2013-08-06 10:03:08

Lock, stock and two smoking barrels.		

Image 3. John Warner profile

The screenshot shows a forum profile for a user named Moonshine. The profile is displayed in a light green box with an orange header. On the left, there is a user name 'Moonshine' and a status 'Новичок (Нет аватара)' (Newbie (No avatar)). To the right, a list of statistics and details is shown in a table-like format.

Профиль: Moonshine		
Moonshine	Зарегистрирован:	Сегодня
Новичок	Приглашений:	0
(Нет аватара)	Провел на форуме:	2 минуты
	Сообщений:	0
	Последнее сообщение:	Никогда
	Последний визит:	Сегодня 16:53:55

Image 4. Moonshine profile



Image 5. *Krasavchik* profile

5.2.1. Names in *Posidelki*

The users are free to choose any username provided that it is not confusingly similar to any of the already existent ones, does not offend anybody, and does not in any other way breach common ethical norms. Both Cyrillic and Latin fonts can be used. Participants are allowed to change their names by reporting to administrators who have access to settings. Although there are no explicitly stated rules regarding the format of usernames (apart from the above-mentioned), the head of the forum (*Likka*) stated a couple of times that she is not too happy with the long ones, for example in these requests to change usernames (Examples 1 and 2)⁴⁷:

Example 1.

1. ***Kalibri_N***: please, make it for me nanakon aka konakona

2. ***Likka***: **kalibri_n** / this nick is too long. and not quite in the style of our forum. would you not invent another one?

⁴⁷ Images in Appendix

Example 2.

1. **Chainik:** boss / why don't you change my nick to grandfather banzai, eh? / in the new year, hell I want to be grandfather banzai and his deers....

2. **Likka:** do you really need to? won't you at least drop the deers?

Both usernames and naming in general seem to be of considerable interest for the participants of this forum as there are a number of topics dedicated to naming.

Titles of discussions dedicated to usernames:

- For those who want to change their nicknames
- Your nick, tell us about it!
- Associations with nicknames
- Nick – Avatar – Signature (game)

Titles of discussions dedicated to other names:

- Our names in the real world
- And how are you called at home?
- Origins of our names
- To change or not to change your surname?
- Choosing name for your child
- Teachers'/ Lecturers' nicknames
- Web site 'the secret of your family name'
- Analysis of your name (test)
- Names (game)
- Your name in Japanese

This might be considered a confirmation that the users are aware of the social significance of naming and display a conscious and active as well as playful approach to it. They also seem to perceive names as an important part of identity and

express attachment to their own usernames as well as to those of others (Examples 3 and 4):

Example 3.

1. *Стрекоза: chainik* / why change the nick / just make your status ‘grandfather banzai’ / otherwise we won’t recognise you...

Example 4.

1. *Стрекоза*: turn our chainik back into chainik again
2. *Krasa*: give us back our chainik that we are used to

Posidelki’s participants are also interested in and share stories about the origins of their usernames (Example 5).

Example 5.

1. *Amfit@dmiN*: the name’s vitalii. that’s why I’m often called vitamin. got fed up with it, decided to become amphetamine. then got bored with the idea of drugs in my nick, decided to add ‘d’ and change ‘a’ into ‘@’
2. *nevasanni*: alas such a well-known river has no correlation with my nick...neva is my name in a chatroom in our town...from the word ‘nevernaia’⁴⁸ (the nick I shall tell you right away is not quite unambiguous...) there was a complicated period in my life not long ago when I ceased having faith in people...men in particular and in love in general

5.3. Gender identity construction in *Posidelki*

Russian is one of the languages where nouns and adjectives have grammatical gender. There are a number of usernames in *Posidelki* that are clearly gendered by the means of grammatical form. Amongst them, the grammatically gendered form

⁴⁸ ‘Unfaithful’ or ‘faithless’

might constitute the main indicator of the gender identity, or might be combined with associations related to semantics.

Adjectives and adjectival nouns in Russian have separate forms for masculine, feminine and neuter grammatical gender. The gender forms are created by inflection and therefore the two forms are parallel. Thus, usernames derived from them will be unambiguously gendered by using one or another form irrespective of the semantics, e.g. *molod* ‘young’ (m), *Строптив@я* [stroptivaia] ‘obstinate’ (f), *святой* [sviatoi] ‘saint’ (m), *Сероглазая* [seroglazaia] ‘grey-eyed’ (f), *рыжая* [ryzhaia] ‘redhead, ginger’ (f), and *Пушистая* [pushystaia] ‘fluffy, soft’ (f). The same applies to the Ukrainian *Шалена*⁴⁹ [shalena] ‘crazy’ (f).

Nouns referring to persons also typically have in Russian separate forms for the two genders. In nouns, however, gender forms are created by derivation and the generic form is normally masculine. Feminine forms are often secondary, typically derived from masculine ones by adding feminine suffixes. They may also carry some expressive value, which can be illustrated for example in terms indicating professions. Although new feminine forms have been introduced after females entered the employment market, many of them, especially those referring to occupations of higher prestige, are only used as colloquial, humorous, or even deprecating terms, e.g. *бизнесменка* [biznesmenka] ‘businesswoman’, *депутатка* [deputatka] ‘deputy’. Stylistically neutral words are mostly the ones referring to professions stereotypically associated with women’s roles, such as *манекенищица* [manekenshchitsa] ‘model’, some professions of low social prestige, e.g. *гардеробщица* [garderobshchitsa] ‘cloakroom attendant’, and those performed by females for a long time, such as *певица* [pevitsa] ‘singer’ and *актриса* [aktrisa] ‘actress’ (Comrie et al., 1996: 233-235).

Thus, in usernames that semantically do not associate with any specific gender, such as *Гость* [gost’] ‘guest’ (m), *Форумчиха* [forumchikha] ‘forumer’ (f) and

⁴⁹ This username may also be a pun on the name Алена, which can be read as Ш. Алена ‘Sh. Alena’, similarly to how *Лурусичка* [lurusichka] might be read as Л. У. Русичка ‘L. U. Rusichka’ (initials and a diminutive form of Руся) (see p. 161).

Незнакомка [neznakomka] ‘stranger’ (f), the grammatical form is the primary gender-typing strategy. Another examples of gender-typing in *Posidelki* by using grammatical form are ethnonyms, such as *Aziatka* ‘an Asian’ (f), *tatar* (m), or *Syamka93*⁵⁰ ‘a Siamese93’ (f). Grammatical forms might also serve as a strategy to indicate another gender that is suggested by the semantics of the username, e.g. *Уличная_Хулиганка* [ulichnaia khuliganka] ‘street hooligan’ (f) might have connoted a masculine identity without feminine suffixes. The strategies of gender-typing might be combined, for example, *LariSKA gitaristka* ‘Lariska the guitarist’ (f) contains a conventional female name and a grammatically feminine form of ‘guitarist’.

In some cases, masculine and feminine equivalents may not only indicate gender, but also generate different connotations. For example, the username *REALGOD* connotes the supreme being in the monotheistic religions. Someone named ‘realgoddess’, on the other hand, would either be associated with polytheistic religions or with an attractive woman. In other cases, one form might be used much more often than the other, so that the term itself becomes associated with a particular gender. The username *Sterv@* ‘bitch’ (f) is one example: the female form is used significantly more often than its male equivalent, ‘stervets’. Some denotations have no equivalents for the opposite gender, e.g. *Кралья* [kralia] ‘a darling, a doll, a bird’, which denotes a specific category of female, or *Alpha_Dog*, a category that has no female equivalent.

Another means of gender identity expression in *Posidelki* is using personal nouns that are different for males and females, e.g. *misterX*, *Lord Fell*, *usman125*, *GiRI*, *Супер Девчонка* [super devchonka] ‘super girl’, *NastyGirl*, *pandagirl*, *KilerLedy2008*, *Lady*, *Дамочка* [damochka] ‘little lady’, *superledi* ‘super lady’, *Mère Susie* ‘mother Susie’ and *Лилия мама* [lilia mama] ‘mum Lilia’.

The majority of usernames in the form of full given names in *Posidelki* are also gender-indicative – only *Эшли* (Ashley), of non-Russian origin, might conventionally be a male or female name.

⁵⁰ It may also refer to a breed of cats.

In general, diminutive forms of customary names might be shared in the case of names that have masculine and feminine equivalents. Sometimes the distinction is conventionally made by habitual usage of different diminutive forms for different genders. For example, in the case of *Viktor* and *Viktoria*, the common perception seems to be that *Vitia* derives from *Victor*, and *Vika* from *Viktoria*. As a result, all derivations with the root *vit-* might be perceived as male while those with *vik-* are seen as female, e.g. *Vitiusha* – *Viktor*, *Vikusha* – *Viktoria*. In *Posidelki*, the usernames *Вика* [vika] and *Вукүся* [vikusia] will more likely be perceived as female.

A number of usernames in the form of short or diminutive given names in *Posidelki* are gender-ambiguous in form. However, the way they are routinely used will render them more associated with a specific gender. For example, usernames *саша* [sasha] and *сашулька* [sashul'ka] might both originate from either *Aleksandr* or *Aleksandra*. Username *саша* does not indicate gender as it is equally common as an informal form of both names, while diminutive *сашулька* might be perceived as female due to the common tendency to associate females with smallness and childishness (Stommel, 2007: 155-157). Using diminutive forms might also be associated with young age, certain social contexts or even depend on geographical locations⁵¹. There are other examples in *Posidelki* of gender-ambiguous informal forms of customary names. The username *лєра* [lera] might be a short form of *Valerii* (m), *Valerian* (m) and *Valeria* (f) (Superanskaia, 2005: 57, 144, 265). The username *Стася* [stasia] stems from *Анастасий* [anastasii] (m), *Станислав* [stanislav] (m), *Станислава* [stanislava] (f), *Анастасия* [anastasia] (f) and some other names (Superanskaia, 2005: 206, 343). The username *Ася* [asia] might be derived from a number of both male and female names, including *Aleksandra* (f), *Aleksandr* (m), *Anastasia* (f), *Anastasii* (m) and *Taisia* (f) (Superanskaia, 2005: 208, 253, 255, 345).

Sometimes, one of the name options (male or female) is so much more common that the short or diminutive forms will be associated only with this name. For example, the usernames *Даша* [dasha], *Дашка* [dashka] and *dasha* might have originated from

⁵¹ See pp. 152-158 for explanation.

either *Daria* (f) or *Darii* (m), but the masculine name *Darii* is so rare that all these usernames will invoke female identities.

Finally, some foreign-looking shortened names may also apply to both males and females: *~Jess~*, *kim*, *nikki* and *alex25*.

The names that designate widely known individuals will immediately be associated with a specific gender. In *Posidelki* there are several usernames of this sort, e.g. *Тарантино* ‘Tarantino’, *kaligyła* ‘Caligula’, *Osiris*, *ЭркульПуаро* ‘Hercule Poirot’ and *СанчоПансо* ‘Sancho Panza’ connote masculine identities, while *Пандора* ‘Pandora’, *ariadna*, *Audrey Tautou*, *Фрося Бурлакова* ‘Frosia Burlakova’, *ДюЙмОвОчка* ‘Thumbelina’ and *Shakira* connote female identities.

Usernames might also be gender-typed by reference to activities or traits commonly ascribed to males or females. There is the common concept of ‘natural’ differences between males and females, and the traditional models of their roles and attributes are widely known. On the other hand, there are more and more alternative models available and acceptable for both genders. Thus, as recommended by EM, it is important to keep in mind the participants’ perspective and local understanding of the categories at hand.

There are a number of usernames in *Posidelki* whose semantics evoke attributes typically ascribed to a specific gender. There are ‘pretty names’ that refer to ‘feminine attractiveness’ expressed in various ways, such as usernames derived from flowers, decorative plants and decorative objects, e.g. *Незабудка* [nezabudka] ‘forget-me-not’, *Рябинка* [riabinka] ‘little rowan(berry)’, *alaya_malva* ‘scarlet mallow’, *Лютик* [liutik] ‘buttercup flower’ and *Бусинка* [businka] ‘little bead’. Although in these examples semantics are their main gender-typing quality, most of them are additionally grammatically feminine, which supports the impression of the femininity. *Лютик* is grammatically masculine but because it ends with -ik, it also looks like a diminutive. The suffix -ik is used to create diminutive forms amongst others from female names, such as in the usernames *K@tik* (Katerina) and *матусик* [tatusik] (Tatiana). *Kalibri* is grammatically neutral, but semantically connotes female rather than male identity.

Grammatical gender and semantic associations to a various extent may affect perceptions of usernames in terms of gender. Such usernames as *Секунда* [sekunda] ‘a second’ and *VILKA* ‘fork’ are grammatically feminine and on this basis may be perceived as displaying female identities. Grammatically feminine diminutives – for example *Пирамидка* [piramidka] ‘a small/little pyramid’ and *Wilo4ka* [vilochka] ‘little fork’ – will also most likely invoke female identities. *Ангел* [angel] is grammatically masculine but might be associated with attributes more often ascribed to females. For example, it functions as a term of reference and address applied to a person who is kind and good-natured, but also pleasant-looking.

Grammatical gender may or may not affect the reading of the following usernames, but in general they do not seem to invoke qualities or activities associated with a specific gender. The grammatically feminine word *собака*⁵² ‘dog’, such as in the username *Старая Собака* [staraia sobaka] ‘old dog’ constitutes a generic form for ‘dogs’. *Анализ* [analiz] ‘analysis’, *енот* [enot] ‘raccoon’, *Призрак* [prizrak] ‘spectre, phantom’ and *Шмель* [shmel’] ‘bumblebee’ are grammatically masculine.

In the case of toponyms, those ending with an ‘a’, e.g. *Africa*, *zhukovka*, *Almata*, might be seen as feminine-looking as in Russian the majority of female names end with an ‘a’, while those ending with a consonant could be deemed masculine-like, e.g. *Lemberg* (Lviv), *patras* (possibly the town in Greece). *Sakartvelo* (Georgia) is not associated with any gender as words ending with -o are grammatically neutral.

There is also a group of usernames derived from foreign vocabulary, especially English, related to various semantic topics, that are not gendered grammatically. In this case, associations generated by semantics will be the only criterion of gender assessment. For example, usernames related to feelings and emotions, such as *~Lovely_Love~*, *LovingHeart*, *smile1* and *SMILE*, are likely to be associated with females. Foreign words that are grammatically gendered, e.g. *Le Soleil* ‘The Sun’ (m) and *cattiva* (Italian) ‘bad’ (f), may be associated with a specific gender for those who know the relevant language.

⁵² In Russian, ‘@’ symbol is also called ‘собака’.

5.3.1. Gender as MCD in *Posidelki*

As explained before, members of specific categories of people are ascribed sets of characteristics that are commonly perceived as attributable to them. It has also been shown, that usernames evoke certain characteristics. Thus, by observing what attributes are brought up in usernames in *Posidelki* that might be used to categorise users as males or females, we can see what concepts about genders are displayed in this forum.

Similarly to what Stommel (2007: 151-153) has observed, in *Posidelki*, nature seems quite a popular source for usernames, and also mostly connote feminine identities. A number of usernames, namely, *Kalendula* ‘Calendula’, *Незабудка* [nezabudka] ‘forget-me-not’, *Мальва* [mal’va] ‘mallow’, *мак* ‘poppy’, *Лилия* [lilia] ‘lily’, *вишенка* [vishenka] ‘little cherry’, *Рябинка* [riabinka] ‘little rowan(berry)’, *Ромашка* [romashka] ‘chamomile’, *alaya_malva* ‘scarlet mallow’, *Belka2010* ‘squirrel’, *Стрекоза* [strekoza] ‘dragonfly’, *Люттик* [liutik] ‘buttercup flower’, *kalibri* ‘hummingbird’, *Kalibri_N*, *cucushonok* ‘cuckoo chick’, *Svetliyachok* ‘little firefly’ and *Ladybird* form a quite coherent group that reference such attributes as ‘pretty’, ‘decorative’, ‘cute’, ‘small’, ‘light’ and ‘delicate’. They might be associated with bodily characteristics typically ascribed to females, but the smallness and lightness of these objects do not refer to eating disorders, which might be considered omnirelevant in Stommel’s study. In addition, some of them are recognised herbs with medicinal qualities (calendula, mallow, rowanberry and chamomile), which may also be related to the idea of nurturing femininity, expressed by a healing power of ‘mother nature’.

Also *верба* [verba] ‘pussy-willow’ and *Iva* ‘willow’ could be included in the group of nature femininity as, although they denote trees, these trees are recognised for their decorative shape and catkins rather than, for example, strength and endurance; in addition, they are both grammatically feminine. The username *hameleonxxx* ‘chameleon’ is grammatically masculine, but it contains ‘xxx’ – letters that in online communication indicate kisses, which might be perceived as an emotional element

associated with femininity. It may also be linked with an idea of the ‘unstable’ or ‘deceptive’ qualities of female ‘nature’.

Raduga ‘rainbow’, *Вселенная* [vselennaia] ‘Universe’ and *Le Soleil* ‘The Sun’ might be referring to meteorological and astrological aspects of nature femininity. *Raduga* and *Вселенная* are both grammatically feminine. *Le Soleil* is grammatically masculine but it is a foreign word; to those who are familiar with French, the grammatical gender might influence the perception.

Stommel (2007: 151-152) has contrasted the concept of feminine ‘mother nature’ with a concept of ‘aggressive, wild, or powerful’ nature that might be perceived as representing masculine qualities. In *Posidelki*, two usernames might form an impression of natural aggression or power: *Мамба* [mamba] and *Eagle*. However, *Мамба* is grammatically feminine, which to some extent neutralises the effect of ‘masculinity’ of this username.

Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008: 258) has observed strategies to construct bodily images in usernames. One of these strategies is to refer to body parts and features that are ‘socially scripted with genderized erotic potential’, such as eyes, lips and hair. In *Posidelki*, there are the following examples: *Сероглазая* [seroglazaia] ‘grey-eyed’, *рыжая* [ryzhaia] ‘redhead, ginger’ and *Пушистая* [pushystaia] ‘fluffy, soft’. These are all grammatically feminine adjectival nouns, thus we will categorise the participants as females. *Krasa* ‘beauty’ is also grammatically feminine and may associate with particularly attractive appearance.

Bodily images may also be constructed by referring to animals and to objects. Del-Teso-Craviotto has noticed that gender-typing in animal usernames is done by a choice of animal that connotes stereotypical male or female features, and that females often presented themselves as cats. In *Posidelki* there are a number of feline usernames that might be seen as following this practice: *кошка* [koshka] ‘cat⁵³, pussycat’, *Kummu* [kitti] ‘kitty’, *Kisa* ‘kitty, pussycat’, *kisa6* and *kiska25627* ‘kitty, kitten’. They may work as endearing terms of address but may also evoke certain

⁵³ In Russian the generic name for a cat is grammatically feminine.

bodily characteristics, such as ‘cute, sweet, small’ for a kitten, or ‘slender, svelte, graceful’ for an adult cat, typically associated with females.

Some usernames referring to inanimate objects may also connect with appearance. In *Posidelki*, they all seem to evoke female identities. *Muftocka* ‘little muff, hand-warmer’ and *Бусинка* [businka] ‘little bead’, decorative elements of woman’s outfits, pertain to style and attire. *Glamik* ‘little glamorous one’ (a new formation) refers to a celebrity-promoted and ostensibly luxurious style. Both *Chanel* and *coco* may refer to the famous designer and founder of the Chanel brand, which is associated with a classic, timeless and tasteful style. The username *bodiartik* [bodyartik] ‘little body art’ (a novel formation) refers to the art of body ornamentation (i.e. tattooing, piercing and scarification), which can also be considered a matter of fashion. This username seems feminine due to the diminutive suffix. All these types of outfits and appearances also invoke associated styles of behaviour and mannerisms. In this sense, somewhat related are *Lady* and *Дамочка* [damochka] ‘little lady’, which might also evoke images of a specific style and conduct. Additionally, *Дамочка* might be seen as hinting at humour or irony.

In *Posidelki*, virtually all usernames referring to bodily images, appearance and style connote feminine identities, which may bring to mind common idea of vanity and preoccupation with looks as feminine attributes. The only male username directly referring to appearance is *Krasavchik* ‘little handsome, pretty boy’ but also ‘a dandy, a fop’. It may also correspond to an Internet meme: in the padonkian language (spelled *Красавчез/Кросавчез/Красафчез*) it is a popular term of address that expresses a positive attitude toward the addressee.

Other usernames that may invoke specific physical characteristics are, for example, *molod* ‘young’, that may be associated with bodily attributes of a young male and *Старушка_Бемми* [starushka betty] ‘grannie/old Betty’ connotes an elderly female⁵⁴. Usernames referring to ethnicity may also invoke specific bodily images, e.g. *tatar* (m), or the grammatically feminine *Aziatka* ‘an Asian’.

⁵⁴ Also used as term of address, see p. 163

Another type of femininity observed by Stommel (2007: 155) is childish femininity characterised by sweetness and cuteness, as well as smallness, vulnerability, insignificance, immaturity and infantilism. In *Posidelki* there are a number of usernames that may invoke these attributes. They include popular terms of endearment : *Kisa*, *kisa6*, *kiska25627*, *Малышка* [malyshka] ‘baby(girl)’, *РЫБКА* [rybka] ‘little fish’, *Sweety* ‘sweetie’, *Pupsik* ‘little doll, cutie’, *lapochka* [lapochka] and *лапочка15* [lapochka] ‘sweetie, honey’. Other groups are cartoon characters: *Kummi* ‘Kitty’ (possibly from the ‘Hello Kitty’ series), *ДюЙМОвОчКа* ‘Thumbelina’, *Лиса алиса* [lisa alisa] ‘Alisa the fox’, and a reference to a young animal: *cucushonok* ‘cuckoo chick’. There is also a considerable number of usernames in the form of diminutive variants of conventional names, such as *аленушка* [alenushka], *Алиночка* [alinochka], *Даночка*, *Олесенька* [olesen’ka], *Рикулька* [rikul’ka], *Юленька* [iulen’ka] and *Юлечка* [iulechka] that as address terms seem suitable for children rather than adults. They will probably connote female rather than male identity, although some of them may be derived from both male and female names, e.g. *сашулька* [sashul’ka] and *Санечка* [sanechka] can originate from Aleksandr or Aleksandra. Only one of the diminutives, *Никитосик* [nikitosik], clearly refers to a male name, Nikita.

Some usernames with the element ‘girl’ – *GiRl*, *Супер Девчонка* [super devchonka] ‘super girl’, *NastyGirl* and *pandagirl* – can also connote ‘childish femininity’. Women are addressed as girls much more often than men are as boys, which might be considered attributing childishness to females (Goroshko, 2002; Stommel, 2007: 155). Abel’s (2009) analysis of how professional female boxers are addressed, described and nicknamed has revealed that male athletes are typically referred to as ‘men’ or ‘young men’, while female athletes are called ‘girls’ and ‘young ladies’, instead of ‘women’ or ‘young women’, which are the direct counterparts of ‘men’ and ‘young men’. According to Abel (2009: 124), the terms ‘girls’ and ‘ladies’ do not just underline that these athletes are females, but also that they are less grown up or less competitive (boxing is not perceived as an activity associated with a category ‘lady’). In *Posidelki*, we can find analogous examples: there is a ‘super girl’ (*Супер Девчонка*) and a ‘super lady’ (*superledi*), but no ‘superwoman’.

In some usernames, ‘childish’ expressions may be used in a humorous and ironic way and contain various types of distortions, which will alter their reading. *СолныФко* [solnyfko], misspelt ‘little sun’, where the sound ‘sh’ is replaced by ‘f’, might indicate or spoof lisp and can be associated with a ‘baby talk’. *МиЛаШшО=)* [milashka] is a padonkian spelling of ‘darling, cutie’. *Nekotenok* ‘non-kitten’ also refers to the term of endearment and might be seen as rejection of being addressed this way. *Маленькая бяка* [malen’kaia biaka] ‘little baddie, little trouble’ refers to *бяка*, a term used with children to refer to any kind of occurrence (object, action, person) that is perceived as bad, nasty or gross. As a self-reference it also may look like it is used tongue-in-cheek.

A common belief links femininity with emotions in opposition to masculinity, which is associated with reason. In effect, women are attributed with a broad selection of qualities seen as a natural consequence of their emotionality. First, women might be seen as affectionate, warm, comforting, loving and caring. Such usernames as *~Lovely_Love~*, *lovestori*, *smile1*, *SMILE*, *LovingHeart* and *Поцелуйка* [potseluika] (a novel formation from *поцеловать* ‘to kiss’ or *поцелуй* ‘a kiss’), ‘the kissing/kissable one; little kiss’ might be tied to this concept of femininity.

Females are also often conceived of as irrational and nonsensical, emotionally unstable, quarrelsome, lacking skills of logical thinking and in general deficient intellectually. In Russian, there are several sayings that reflect and perpetuate such attitudes. The expressions *женский ум* ‘feminine mind’ and *женская логика* ‘feminine logic’ are commonly understood as referring to intellectual deficiency. The proverb *У бабы волос долог, а ум короток* ‘A woman has long hair, but a short mind’ is even more direct (Telia, 1996: 233). A woman is also often described as *вздорная* ‘cantankerous’, *базарная* ‘of marketplace mentality’, *шаленая/шальная* ‘crazy, mad’ or *бой-баба* ‘headstrong woman’. A woman, as it is believed, tends to engage in such activities as *женские скандалы* ‘womanly scandals’ and *женские ссоры* ‘womanly quarrels’ (Telia, 1996: 261-265).

Some usernames in *Posidelki* may be associated with a concept of feminine emotional instability and irrationality by reference to emotions, mental states and personality. These are: *Шалена* [shalena] ‘crazy’, *Меланхолия* [melankholia]

‘melancholy’, *Лавина эмоций* [lavina emotsii] ‘avalanche of emotions’, *Странная* [strannaia] ‘strange, weird’, *Стронтив@я* [stroptivaia] ‘obstinate’, *prichuda* ‘whim; freak’, *Plaksa* ‘crybaby’, *царапка* [tsarapka] (from *царапать* ‘to scratch’) ‘the scratching/scratchy one’, *Одинокая звезда* [odinokaia_zvezda] ‘lonely star’, *~Грубая Нежность~* [grubaia nezhnost’] ‘rough tenderness’ and *Психованная Ёлка* [psikhovannaia iolka] ‘mental Christmas tree’. All these usernames are grammatically feminine – although in the case of *prichuda* and *Plaksa* the same (feminine) form applies to both male and female referents.

Other examples of usernames that may be read as displaying female identities are *~Angel~* and *Ангел* [angel] ‘angel’ as well as *White AngeL* and *~Sweet Angel~*. ‘Angel’ is used as a term of address for a person of a good nature but also a pleasant appearance. Although in Russian ‘angel’ is grammatically masculine, it will probably be associated with a female rather than a male.

The stereotypically feminine roles often involve such activities and qualities as ‘caring, feeding, nurturing’. The username *кормилица* [kormilitsa] ‘wet nurse’ may bring related associations. It may also illustrate conceptual differences between grammatically masculine and feminine forms of the same word: the masculine variant *кормилец* [kormilets] ‘breadwinner’ evokes a totally different image. Another example of references invoking these qualities might be food. *Ватрушка* [vatrushka] ‘a pie with soft cheese’ and *kulebyaka* ‘a pie with a savoury stuffing’ refer to traditional Russian dishes. These usernames may be associated with a traditional model of a woman’s role and connote such activities as feeding and nurturing (Stommel, 2007: 143; Telia, 1996: 264). Additionally, the ‘traditionalism’ of this type enhances a displayed preference for home-made food that might be contrasted with fast food.

In Russian, a woman is also often described by gastronomical terminology as a sex partner. Numerous food-related expressions circulate as articulations of feminine sexual attractiveness, such as *лакомый кусок* ‘tasty bite, tasty morsel’, *аппетитная* ‘appetising, yummy’, *сладкая* ‘sweet’, *ядреная баба* ‘juicy, succulent woman’ and *пальчики оближешь* (literally: ‘lick your fingers’) ‘very tasty, toothsome’ (Telia, 1996: 241, 264). *Джуси Фрукта* [juicy fruitka] ‘little/female juicy fruit’ (the suffix

-ka may indicate both diminutive and feminine forms) and *малиновый десерт* [malinovyi desert] ‘strawberry dessert’ might be linked to this concept of femininity and relevant set of attributes.

Another concept of the relationship between food and female identity is that women are often preoccupied with dieting. This might be related to the fact that, as Stommel (2007: 143) explains, women are required ‘to learn to feed others and not the self. At the same time, girls learn to construe desires for feeding the self as greedy and excessive.’ The username *Activia*, referring to a product marketed predominantly toward women, may be associated with non-greedy and diet-supporting self-feeding. In addition, ending with -a, it may look like a female name.

There are also some examples of usernames indicating female identities that invoke alternative sets of attributes than those traditionally ascribed to females. *Царица Ирина* [tsaritsa irina] ‘Tsarina Irene’ refers to a role linked to qualities and activities related to power, authority, superiority and wealth. This role belongs to the public sphere and requires creativity, self-confidence and self-control as well as management skills, which are commonly seen as natural for men. *JannaDark88* also refers to a figure that brings to mind qualities traditionally considered as typically masculine: leadership ability, charisma, bravery, courage and endurance as well as combat skills. *Уличная Хулиганка* [ulichnaia khuliganka] ‘street hooligan’, on the other hand, refers to activities of an unlawful character that also evoke someone rough and violent and are commonly perceived as masculine. *Супер Девчонка* [super devchonka] ‘super girl’ and *superledi* ‘super lady’ may be reminiscent of the comic book character Superman. These usernames may also be associated with roles that are not conventionally female as comic book superheroes are mostly males.

Some usernames bring up derogatory connotations. *Sterv@* ‘bitch’ and *Кралья* [kralia] ‘a chick, a darling’ function as terms denoting categories of women. *Sterv@* brings very similar associations to its English counterpart: it functions as an offensive term, but has been ‘reappropriated’ and amongst certain categories of users or in specific social contexts is considered a tongue-in-cheek compliment that

connotes a strong and successful woman⁵⁵. *СаМоЧка_СоБаЧки* [samochka sobachki] ‘little female doggy’ might be read as a playful euphemism for ‘bitch’. *Краля* is a colloquial denotation of an attractive woman in general or somebody’s ‘crush’ or lover (Ozhegov and Shvedova, 1999: 302). It is an expression of disparaging character; it is also an ironic term of reference invoking a specific style of self-presentation and conduct, namely, a woman perceived as arrogant and over-styled. The username *клоп-воиючка* [klop-voniuchka] ‘stinky bedbug’ looks like a very self-deprecating or sarcastic appellation. It is grammatically masculine.

Username referring to categories typically represented by males are not numerous in *Posidelki*. *Alpha_Dog*, *JoeJock2007* and *Djok* evoke such attributes as physical strength, dominance and aggression. *REALGOD* and *Создатель Миров* [sozdatel' mirov] ‘creator of worlds’ may evoke unlimited power and control that has not just natural, but also supernatural, source and justification. *Корсар10000* [korsar] ‘corsair’, *Executioner* and *Хитер* [khiter] ‘hitter’ refer to activities associated with males. The username *шлямбур* [shliambur] (an element of climbing equipment), although it refers to an activity (climbing) that is far from being performed exclusively by males, will be perceived as indicating a male rather than a female, as it is grammatically masculine and connotes physical strength and endurance, commonly attributed to males rather than females.

References to specific figures and characters may be seen as a separate group as they invoke not only certain categories of persons with their attributes but also a set of individual traits. In *Posidelki* there are several references to both male and female figures from classic and popular culture. For example, *ЭркюльПуаро* ‘Hercule Poirot’ brings to mind not only the category ‘detective’ and a set of generally associated attributes, but also specific working habits, attire, speech and mannerisms characteristic of this particular detective. The simple and sane *СанчоПансо* ‘Sancho Panza’ and neurotic, over-sensitive *werter124* ‘Werther’ are other examples of

⁵⁵[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitch_\(insult\)#Modern_use](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitch_(insult)#Modern_use). For example, the site <http://www.livelib.ru/selection/7342> lists 32 books related to the category ‘sterva’ both directly (e.g. handbooks how to become one) and indirectly (i.e. about women who are considered as belonging to this category, including *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, *Laughter in the Dark* by Vladimir Nabokov and *The Best Among Us* by Helene Uri).

literary characters' names used as usernames that represent certain types of persons as well as individual traits. Mythological⁵⁶ deities were often 'specialised' in particular areas of activities. In *Posidelki*, there are *Osiris* that refers to the god of afterlife and resurrection and *~Шу~* 'Shu' that references the god of air, who keeps the earth and the sky separate. In addition, they may invoke images of how they were depicted by the Egyptians. There are also references to male characters in computer games: *Atagachi* (possibly 'Tagachi') and *Lord Fell*. *RiptoR* probably refers to a reptilian from a computer game, too; however, it is not clear whether this creature is male or female. It is presented as physically strong and violent, which may associate it with a male rather than female. Also, as the name ends with a consonant, it looks male rather than female. *Katashi* and *Inyasha* are probably references to male characters from manga and anime (comic book and cartoon series of Japanese origins); they might seem ambiguous to those unfamiliar with the series. *Vuky* (possibly 'Wookie') seems ambiguous, as it is a name for a species (in 'Star Wars'), not of a specific individual. This username might be perceived as, perhaps, more likely to indicate male than female identity on the basis that the recognisable (named) members of the species are males, and that the 'Star Wars' series seems a 'male genre' and also seems to have more male than female fans. The username *kelpie* might also seem ambiguous. It refers to a water spirit in Scottish folklore that may adopt a form of a horse or a human; it attracts humans to the waterside and drowns them. They are typically male but may also adopt the form of a beautiful woman.

There are fewer references to actual persons. *Hitsugi* is a stage name of a male rock musician, but again, might not immediately be associated with any specific gender if one does not know it. *Тарантино* 'Tarantino' may bring to mind his satirical films characterised by 'aestheticisation of violence'⁵⁷, while *kaligyla* 'Caligula' is probably mostly recognised as a particularly tyrannical Roman emperor. These names are known to a wide audience and will be considered as clearly gendered.

⁵⁶ It should be noted that mythological names are often transferred to the contemporary context, for example as names of characters in films and games, as brand names, and other things. For example, there is a Russian rock band named *Психея* 'Psyche', thus various individuals might have different ideas about this username.

⁵⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quentin_Tarantino

The female fictional referents also come from literature, mythology and popular culture. *Пандора* ‘Pandora’, according to Greek mythology was the first human woman on earth who brought the evils to the world by opening the jar. *Kali13666* denotes a powerful but also violent goddess of time, death and destruction. The username *ariadna* ‘Ariadne’, is best known from the myth about saving the Theseus from the Minotaur’s labyrinth. The username *liliputka* may refer to the small people of *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift or a short person in general. It indicates a female referent by the suffix -ka. *Гермиона* ‘Hermione’ will be most widely recognised as a young witch from the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling, but there are a number of characters of this name in mythology and fiction. She is depicted as a talented and knowledgeable student of magic school, but also emotional. *Харуко* [kharuko] is a popular Japanese female name, while *харука* [kharuka] is a unisex name, but is rarely used for males. They are both names of a number of characters in manga and anime. To those who are unfamiliar, they might not seem obviously gendered. Female manga and anime characters are often depicted with exaggerated secondary sexual characteristics and wearing revealing clothing. They might be thus associated with a specific model of appearance and fit the image of ‘sex object’.

Amongst female referents, there are also Russian characters. *AnnaKarenina*, a character from a novel by Lev Tolstoy, may bring to mind an array of questions of a social, ethical and existential character, but is directly linked with feelings and emotions. *Ассоль* [assol’] from *Scarlet Sails* by Aleksandr Grin refers to a fairy-tale type of a girl waiting for her prince. *Фрося Бурлакова* [frosia burlakova], a character from a Russian classic comedy, is a provincial girl who relocates to Moscow and represents a naïve, pure mind in contrast to the pretentiousness of the big city’s intellectual elite.

Some names of real-life female figures have also been utilised as usernames in *Posidelki*. *Ди* [di] might refer to the late Princess of Wales, widely admired for her public activity and sympathised with for unhappy personal life. *Audrey Tautou*, an actress, as well as *Keisha*, *Shakira* and *brihanna* ‘Rihanna’ (popular singers), are more recent figures. It is notable that all these referents, apart from their successful professional careers, are recognised for their attractive looks.

A number of usernames in *Posidelki* refer to characteristics that are not recognised as typical for one or the other gender. *Незнакомка* [neznakomka] ‘stranger’, *Santalara* and *Форумчиха* [forumchikha] ‘forumer’ are clearly female because of the grammatical gender or containing a female name, while *Гость* [gost’] ‘guest’, *святой* [sviatoi] ‘saint’ and *Amigo* ‘friend’ are clearly male (amigo is a foreign word, but is widely known) due to grammatical gender rather than semantics. *ЧеловекБезИмени* [chelovek bez imeni] ‘man without name’ will probably first bring to mind a male as it is grammatically masculine, although *человек* ‘man’ applies to both men and women, while *без имени* [bez imeni] ‘without name’ is gender-neutral. *Гитарист* [gitarist] ‘guitarist’ is grammatically masculine, while *LariSKA gitaristka* ‘Lariska the guitarist’ is feminine. *Vampire Ksardas* and *Вампириша* [vampirsha] ‘vampiress’ also indicate male and female gender respectively. *Пилигрим* [piligrim] ‘pilgrim’, *Скиталец* [skitalets] ‘wanderer’ and *lunatic* ‘sleepwalker’ are grammatically masculine and therefore may seem to indicate males. *@RTi\$T*, if read as a transcription of *артист* [artist], which in Russian is grammatically masculine, might also be associated with a male rather than female. *Jester* is typically depicted as a male, so it will probably suggest masculine identity. *Chainik* ‘teapot, dummy’ and *призрак* [prizrak] ‘spectre, phantom’ are grammatically masculine but do not have grammatically female equivalents and thus may look ambiguous. *Старая Собака* [staraia sobaka] ‘old dog’ also seems ambiguous as the grammatically feminine *собака* is the generic term for ‘a dog’ in Russian. Some usernames might carry various associations, e.g. *Bloom* may relate to flowers, a surname, several song titles, brand names and some other names. *Sirin* might be a mythological creature or a pseudonym of Nabokov. *Небесное Создание* [nebesnoe sozdanie] ‘heavenly creature’, which in Russian is neutral in terms of grammatical gender, apart from its primary meaning, may invoke the movie *Heavenly Creatures*, or a Russian puppet cinema film for adults from 1956 called *Небесное Создание*.

Melodia ‘melody’, *Секунда* [sekunda] ‘a second’ and *VILKA* ‘fork’ may seem feminine as they are grammatically feminine while *енот* [enot] ‘raccoon’, *Шмель* [shmel’] ‘bumblebee’ and *Анализ* [analiz] ‘analysis’ are grammatically masculine. *Пирамидка* [piramidka] ‘little pyramid’, *Wilochka* [vilochka] ‘little fork’ and

РеклаМКо [reklamka] ‘little ad’ may seem feminine because of the grammatical gender and diminutive form, although in *РеклаМКо*, a padonkian spelling of *рекламка*, changing -a into -o, visually distorts the feminine gender (pronunciation remains the same) as ending -o is typical for neutral grammatical gender. On the other hand, *kislota* ‘acid’ (which may refer to LSD) is also grammatically feminine, but does not suggest any particular gender.

There are a number of usernames that originated from English vocabulary and are not gendered grammatically, and not clearly gendered semantically as well: *Sleepwalker*; *easyeas*, *Happy Free Bird*, *MyDoom*, *SainT*, *Sunday*, *secret555*, *SKI*, *stop*, *blind*, *Standart*, *needle*, *mirror* ‘mirror’, *Fluid*, *Bag*, *Air*, *eNENeRGY*, *Energy+*, *manki* ‘monkey’, *mola-mola*, *Hazelnut*, *kid09*, *-inception*, *newalias*, *Noname*, *Chupa-Chups*, *antiMiracle*, *simple-words*, *Silk*, *Venom*, *Smiling Spectre*, *sherrymark728*, *scarsopen*, *Noname*, *joystik19*, *Moonshine* and †*DarkNess*†. Some of them may invoke associations with one or the other gender to some users but not to others. Another group of usernames that might be gender-ambiguous are references to titles and excerpts from media and literature, for example: *Gothica*, *Rigveda*, *Oikuméne*, *syndarin*. Perhaps their form may affect the perception, e.g. those ending with -a may remind others of female names. Usernames derived from collective pseudonyms, such as names of bands: *AKADO*, *Electrovamp*, and possibly also *Психея*, †*DarkNess*†, *Venom* and *Overkill* also may or may not evoke a specific gender. Sometimes they may generate contradictory associations. For example, *Психея* ‘Psyche’ may be associated with a female mythological figure and a rock band. If the band is considered, all its members are males, which may suggest a male. On the other hand, a female fan of the band might also be considered by the audience.

There is also a group of gender-ambiguous usernames that seem like abbreviations or novel formations whose meanings are only known to their authors, e.g. *groes77*, *BARS5911*, *awtoyscom* (‘www.awtoys.com?’), *dmxexe* (‘dmx.exe?’), *aeda*, *ulireuu*, *turpb*, *ttord* (name ‘Tord?’), *suc95*, *stra111*, *rps*, *XS*, *PR*, *LAX*, *acz*, *arv*, *dir10*, *ntu1108*. Perhaps those users who are able to decipher them will be able to ascribe some characteristics to them, which may or may not include gender. First- and

second-person pronouns (*you6907*, *Prosto_YA* ‘just me’) as well as random letters and numbers (*34562*, *aaaa*) do not provide any gender-indicative cues, either.

5.3.2. Summary

In *Posidelki*, usernames are constructed as gender-typing by their forms and semantics, referring to conventional names as well as names of famous referents. Many usernames do not mention the relevant features directly, but refer to persons or objects that are associated with certain attributes or sets of attributes that are more or less commonly perceived as gendered.

Some ideas of ‘male’ and ‘female’ characteristics referred to partly overlap with earlier observations, e.g. Stommel’s (2007) concepts of nature and childish femininities, Del-Teso-Craviotto’s (2008) idea of usernames projecting images of bodies and ‘feline names’ to convey female identity, or Scheidt’s (2001) observation of female identity as a ‘sex object’. They may also reproduce linguistic behaviours towards genders, e.g. there are usernames containing the word ‘girl’ but not ‘boy’. In general, with gendered nouns and adjectives, it is more difficult to avoid gender-typing usernames in Russian, whereas usernames in English are more often gender-ambiguous.

Several usernames refer to stereotypical models of gender identities. For example, amongst usernames suggesting female identity, many directly or indirectly refer to various aspects of appearance; also, usernames related to feelings and emotions are more likely to suggest female identities, while stereotypically masculine identities are characterised by activity, creativity, dominance and aggression. The exceptions are few, e.g. *УлицHaЯ_XyЛuΓaHкA* ‘street hooligan’ (f) and *werter124*.

So far, researchers have tended to focus on how gender identities are conveyed in usernames. While this is certainly an important and interesting topic, researchers seem to pay little attention at the fact that typically considerable numbers of usernames are ambiguous. For example, in Scheidt’s (2001) sample, out of 396 usernames, 134 were of unknown gender (such as *~spicy~*, *~Hype~*, *I HAD TO FALL TO LOSE TO IT ALL*). Also Subrahmanyam et al. (2004: 656) states that of

the total of 52 names extracted for analysis, six were excluded from further analysis due to disagreement in coding (e.g. *Breethebrat*, *CHSBones*), and a further 20 were coded as ambiguous (e.g. *CrazyDrum*, *Flwthatsmoi*, *InsulentBrat1004*), thus, in fact, out of the whole sample, 50% of usernames were ambiguous. Similarly, in *Posidelki*, although a notable majority of usernames might be described as gendered, a number of them do not display any qualities that are commonly recognised as typically feminine or masculine. This is in line with Alford's (1987: 66) observation that not all names in general are gender-typing. If, however, as suggested by Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008), usernames represent the users' bodies, in CMC we encounter some bodies that are not gendered. This might confirm that, as postulated by EM, gender is not perceived as essentially relevant in all communicational contexts.

5.4. Classification of usernames

We are a species that categorizes and labels.

(Algeo and Algeo, 2000: 265)

Although gender is the category most often indicated in names, it is far not the only one. As Anderson (2007: 136) has observed, along with gender, names typically convey a range of other information about the named. For example, European names, among others, may be seen as indicating kinship, class, marital relationships, ethnicity and religion. Naming may both indicate changes in social status and effect the shift in status (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2006: 9). Alford (1987: 24) has noticed correlations between naming practices and a number of sociocultural variables that define the social structure, such as structural complexity of the society, its religious organisation, system of descent (patrilineal or matrilineal), or whether or not division into social classes is present. Thus, in short, names inform about those categories that are considered important in specific types of social organisation and reflect how societies conceptualise the identities of their members (Alford, 1987: 78).

Similarly, gender is rarely the only category that is indicated in usernames; often, it only accompanies other categories. For example, Androutsopoulos (2006: 525, 539) and Tynes et al. (2004) have observed how gender may be combined with ethnicity (e.g. *Persian_Girly*), while in Scheidt's (2001) data usernames of both male and

female teenagers were often found to include age (e.g. *Tracey14*). Androutsopoulos (2006: 525) has noticed that usernames indicated a variety of identity aspects, such as appearance, character traits and interests. The naming patterns in the online communities, similarly to the offline ones, seem to depend on the character of the community. For example, in the Internet communities that can be described as ‘thematic’, the naming patterns might be correlated with the omnirelevant MCDs that we can observe there. In the research of Stommel and Koole (2010) in the forum for people with eating disorders, to be accepted as a member of the forum, one had to demonstrate being a recovering sufferer. In Androutsopoulos’s (2006) study into various Germany-based diaspora groups (e.g. the Persian *iran-now.de*, Indian *theinder.net* or Russian *germany.ru*) there are no such restrictions in terms of membership, but such MCDs as nationality and ethnicity may still be considered omnirelevant. In Subrahmanyam et al.’s (2004) and Scheidt’s (2001) studies, age might be considered omnirelevant as the chat spaces that they researched are addressed to teenagers, thus a specific age group. In Del-Teso-Craviotto’s (2008) research, the omnirelevant categories will be defined for each room, e.g. ‘Thirties Love’, ‘Gay 30s’, ‘Catholic Singles’ and ‘Ethnic Latin’. To be sure, this does not mean that all members of these communities will present relevant identities, but they might be assessed as belonging or not belonging to the stated category.

In the case of *Posidelki*, although the participants are somehow united by the name of the forum⁵⁸ and the common ‘space’ they are occupying, and should be able to communicate in Russian, no specific category of users are addressed as a target group of the forum, or a specific purpose of communication mentioned. Thus, there does not seem to be an MCD that can be thought of as omnirelevant on this forum, apart from the typical division of participants into administration and regular participants (and possibly unregistered *lurkers*). Thus, we can say that there will be no such lens to look through as in the above described environments at the identities performed in *Posidelki*, or a clear point of reference to construct the shared knowledge.

⁵⁸ The name of the forum, ‘gatherings’, although does not determine the type of participants or the topic of conversations, suggests an informal setting.

The understanding and usage of names within a specific society is based on the shared knowledge of the naming system. First, the number and kind of components of personal names are typically standardised. The sources of names vary between the cultures, but are also more or less defined. Names might be selected from a scope of customary names, referring to common thematic domains (e.g. characteristics of the named or circumstances at birth), might be selected in a specified way (e.g. might be obtained from dreams), or, for some types of names, might be ascribed to everybody (e.g. Akan day names) (Agyekum, 2006: 213, 219, 222; Alford, 1987: 40, 60-62).

On the Internet, naming customs also vary significantly. For example, student email addresses are typically ascribed to every user on the same basis, namely, the student's name or number. In this case the information that the username carries is unambiguous and clear to everyone. On the other hand, in informal CMC, the instructions regarding name choice indicate restrictions rather than specify recommendations on what form and content are appropriate in usernames. Thus, these instructions cover the maximal length of usernames rather than specific length, or what vocabulary cannot be used (e.g. offensive) rather than what should be used. This makes the common ground of naming patterns more undefined and to a greater extent constructed by individual choices of community members.

5.4.1. Classification ideas

There have been some attempts at classifying usernames, e.g. by Van Langendonck (2007: 301-306), Sidorova (2006: 92-96), Scheidt (2001), Swennen (2001: 97-136) and Bechar-Israeli (1995). Scheidt's (2001) study has confirmed that omnirelevant MCDs may affect not just the reading of usernames (such as in Stommel, 2007), but also what classes are present in certain communities. For example, classification performed by Scheidt (2001) revealed that teenagers selected their usernames from different realms than adults.

Typically, classifications organise usernames into thematic classes and subclasses, in the form of a list or cascading structure. The classification presented by Van

Langendonck (2007: 300-306)⁵⁹ includes two main fields: psychologically motivated and semantically motivated usernames. Semantically motivated usernames are divided into ‘the person’ and ‘the world in which the person lives’. These two groups contain two classes each: ‘the person as such’ and ‘the person’s life’, and ‘past time’ and ‘present time’ respectively. These are further divided into several subclasses. For example, ‘the person as such’ contains references to physical appearance (physiognomy and attire), personality, conviction or faith, and names (real names, expressive and hypocoristic forms and other examples of playing with forms, and bynames).

Sidorova (2006: 95-96) has proposed a more detailed classification containing 34 classes, some of them further divided into several subclasses. For example, the class ‘characteristics’ has been divided into: ‘appearance’, ‘the little ones’, ‘the good ones’, ‘the bad ones’, ‘the different ones’ and ‘the modest ones’. The class related to the ‘animate world’ is subdivided into ‘felines’ and ‘other animals’. Other examples of classes are ‘diseases’, ‘dark forces and death’ and ‘colour-related’.

The classification proposed by Bechar-Israeli (1995) is less complex. For example, the class ‘self related names’ includes usernames referring to any type of information concerning the person: character traits, appearance, the state of the ‘self’ (e.g. *sleepless*), profession, hobbies, age, relationships with other people, affiliations with places, and other usernames where the person or the ‘self’ is central. Flora and fauna are grouped with inanimate objects of any kind, e.g. weapons, cars and food, as ‘elements of our surroundings’.

It is understandable that classifications may vary depending on the data samples. However, we can also observe different concepts of the relationships between these classes. For example, in the classification presented by Van Langendonck, names of figures and personages are split among various thematic classes, e.g. world of books, sports, entertainment, etc., and placed within these classes along other phenomena related to the specific field, so that, for example, the class ‘world of books’ contains:

⁵⁹ Van Langendonck’s classification is based on material and analysis from an unpublished licentiate dissertation of his student Swennen (2001).

characters, authors, poets and strips. In Sidorova's classification, on the other hand, 'names of people' and 'names of characters' are higher-level classes divided into thematic groups, namely: 'politicians', 'writers and philosophers', 'actors and musicians', and 'others' in the former, and 'book characters', 'movie characters' and 'cartoon characters' in the latter. References to phenomena other than names of persons or characters within the fields of literature, philosophy, entertainment, etc. are grouped separately. For example, the group 'citations' includes movie titles and extracts, book titles and extracts, names of bands, titles of songs and quotations, as well as proverbs, sayings and common phrases. Bechar-Israeli, on the other hand, has grouped usernames related to literature, fairy-tales, films, plays and television together with references to both famous people and fictional characters. The class 'professions' is another example: in Sidorova's work, professions are classified as 'status', and in Van Langendonck's included in 'activities', while according to Bechar-Israeli this is an aspect of 'self'. This demonstrates that the ideas about how the social reality is organised may vary – in this case, differences might indicate drawing on various scopes of common knowledge⁶⁰ or differences between researchers' individual preferences.

An example of how the perspective of evaluation is established can be found in Sidorova's and Van Langendonck's works and illustrated by how they conceptualise mythology. The following concepts about mythology and religion can be observed:

- Mythology and religion are two separate phenomena

Mythology and religion are conceptualised as unrelated phenomena. For example, Sidorova (2006: 96) presents 'mythology' as a separate class from 'religions and philosophies'.

- Mythology belongs to the bygone era

⁶⁰ All three researchers represent different backgrounds or affiliations: Van Langendonck – University of Leuven, Sidorova - Lomonosov Moscow State University, and Bechar-Israeli – Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Mythology is conceptualised as collections of tales and legends irrelevant in modern society. For example, Van Langendonck (2007: 304) has placed ‘mythological personages’ in the class ‘past time’.

- Mythological personages are necessarily fictitious

The fictitiousness of mythological figures is presented as an objective, undisputable fact. As Van Langendonck (2007: 304) says of the class ‘past time’:

A number of nicks were coined on the basis of fictitious, mythological personages or of real, historical figures. The choice of such figures does not imply any identification of the name bearer with them.

These ideas represent the viewpoints of the researchers who ascribed their own classifications onto the data. For example, Van Langendonck (2007: 304) cites the username *Vishnu* to illustrate a reference to mythology. In fact, this username may be read not only as a reference to a character in the collection of fables created long time ago, but also as a reference to the world’s third largest religion and, in the context of Flemish CMC, may be read as presenting an identity related to the Hindu minority. Thus, we should keep in mind that the researcher’s perspective is just one amongst many possible. As Danet et al. (1997) put it:

There is a certain amount of risk in the interpretations of the nicks we develop (...). However, we are actually in the same position as the players themselves, who must develop their own interpretations of the textual mask presented by any given player.

The above-presented issues may cause certain problems. First, the inconsistencies in the classification systems make the research material difficult to compare with other studies. Second, researchers’ assessment of individual usernames and their place within the classification may also vary. In fact, various types of inconsistencies and inaccuracies in studies on proper names are not unusual, especially in works authored by non-onomasticians who may lack training in onomastic methods. A typical illustration constitutes classifications composed to represent parents’ motivations for child name choices. For example, Adminienè and Nausèda (2009: 329–330) used ratings of popular baby names compiled by the departments of statistics in Britain, Canada and the US in 2007 and assessed that the names *Elizabeth*, *Harry* and

William were popular amongst the British parents ‘because of the influence of the royal family’. While it is true that these names are shared with members of the royal family, the ratings of popularity say nothing about why those names were selected.

Another difficulty in analysing onomastic material might be distinguishing between etymology and motivation. Etymological analysis of names has been used approximately since the beginning of the nineteenth century. It focuses on revealing the derivational bases of names and is useful in investigating the history of settlement. The material is presented in the form of dictionaries of documented personal names (not of bearers of names) (Blanár, 2009: 138). Some names have multiple etymological origins. For example, the surname *Hill* may be derived from a topographical feature as in ‘Johannes atte Hyll (1379 Wa PT)’ or from a personal name as in ‘Rogerus filius Hille (1221 D Cur)’ (Parkin, 2013: 201). It seems to be a common phenomenon that usernames are derived from terms recycled from different contexts. Swennen (2001: 71) gives an example of a user who named himself *BigBrother* after the Orwell character but changed the username when the TV show became popular, assuming that the etymology would be misread. Thus, researchers should not ignore the possibility of multiple etymologies rather than referring only to the one that is the most obvious to them.

Classifications of names by their motivational features are used to investigate patterns in naming practices (Blanár, 2009: 139–140). To illustrate the difference, Parkin (2013: 201) compares these two approaches in classification of surnames using the example of two different works on English surnames and by-names in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries excerpted from the same sources. For example, the surname *Bridge* etymologically stems from the noun ‘bridge’, but in terms of motivation may be a locational surname (referring to someone who lived at or near a bridge) or an occupational surname (someone who worked at a bridge, e.g. toll-taking).

In the classifications of usernames it is not always clear whether the author aimed at etymological or motivational analysis. For example, there is typically created a class of usernames referring to animals, e.g. ‘member of the animal world’ (Sidorova, 2006: 95) and ‘nicknames related to flora and fauna’ (Bechar-Israeli, 1995) – next to

classes of characterising usernames, e.g. ‘qualities’ (Sidorova, 2006: 95) and ‘nicknames related to the self’ (Bechar-Israeli, 1995). However, animal names also work as characterising names – referring both to personal traits as well as other aspects of self, which can often be observed in onomastic studies. For example, the medieval by-name *Sheep*, etymologically referring to the animal, motivationally may have been applied metonymically to someone who had a sheep-related occupation (shepherd or wool-dealer) or have been used to characterise a timid person (Parkin, 2013: 201).

Motivations and etymologies are not always unambiguously related. In Butkus’s (1999: 129) study into contemporary Lithuanian nicknames based on a survey, the same characteristics were referred to by various nicknames, and the same nicknames were allocated based on various characteristics. For example, nicknames of strong men were created based on various associations, including hard substances (*Ažuolinis* ‘oaken’, *Geležinis* ‘of iron’) and big, strong creatures (*Meška* ‘bear’, *Milžinas* ‘giant’, *Slibinas* ‘dragon’); on the other hand, the nickname *Meška* ‘bear’ was also used to indicate slowness and sluggishness.

Another important point is the potential discrepancy between the producer and the recipient. For example, in Swennen’s (2001: 103–104) study of usernames based on a survey, the informants’ explanations of usernames *Smartnikebabe* and *Bitch_In_Pink* were ‘favourite clothing brand is Nike’ and ‘likes wearing pink’. From the viewpoint of the audience, there are more meaningful elements in these usernames than just a brand and a colour. The components ‘smart’ and ‘babe’ in the former, and ‘bitch’ in the latter are at least equally noticeable as those components referred to by the informants.

Finally, in actual communication names might be used ironically or otherwise opaquely. Leslie and Skipper (1990: 274), for example, explain that one of them (Skipper) has a close friend who addresses him as *You Crazy Bastard*, which they both recognise as a term of endearment. Similarly, Mashiri (2004: 34) describes how two adult daughters call their mother *Mother Teresa* because of her ‘excessive generosity’.

Thus, names can be approached using various methods depending on the goal of a specific study. Since usernames are often studied as some kind of reflection of identities, it is reasonable to frame them as part of communication rather than single linguistic units. Rather than focus on the words from which usernames originate, it might make more sense to focus on where the usernames place the named persons within the system of social categorisation.

I propose to structure the classification of usernames so that they can be read as inference-rich (see p. 83) terms of categorisation, meaning every username can be treated as a name of a membership category with an associated set of attributes. On this basis, I will look for MCDs that might be used to group these category members as well as observe what fields of common knowledge may have been referred to in order to invoke these categories. Using MCDs as tools to classify them seems productive as they are an important aspect of communication and serve to catalogue entities by their characteristics. Such an approach also takes into consideration multiple etymologies and motivations, possible variants of audience evaluation and context dependence. It also shifts the focus from the researcher's viewpoint to the perspective of language users, in that it represents what ideas could potentially be associated with these terms rather than how they fit the researcher's idea of their classification.

Perhaps studies into other types of names could also benefit from the approach more focused on the human aspect of naming practices, i.e. what certain names can tell us about the named rather than what type of name it is. For example, in Tupikov's (1903: 376–377) dictionary of Old Russian names, we can find a name *Субота* [subota]. This name was derived from *суббота* 'Saturday', and most possibly indicated individuals born on Saturday. But apart from asking about the etymology and motivation of this name we can also ask why this name was selected above all other possible choices: did being born on a Saturday equip the person with certain qualities? Did it entail specific expectations? In any case, whatever attributes they

were, they were very possibly shared with other members of the category ‘born on Saturday’.⁶¹

5.4.2. Username and membership categorisation

According to MCA research, people in everyday life categorise themselves and others not just in terms of general demographic categories, but operate countless, more or less ‘standard’ identities, such as ‘girl’, ‘married woman’, ‘Australian’, ‘normal’, ‘deviant’, ‘average citizen’, ‘affectionate father’, ‘the terminally dim’, ‘the-caller-with-a-legitimate-complaint-and-not-a-time-waster’, ‘anarchist’, ‘guitarist’, ‘prostitute’, ‘gravedigger’, ‘pimp’, ‘nerd’, ‘astronaut’, ‘skinhead’, ‘boozier’ and ‘former boy scout leader’. These categories are characterised by sets of attributes and can be ascribed to certain MCDs in reference to the common knowledge shared between the involved parties (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 65; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 14; Hester and Eglin, 1997: 3).

As already explained (p. 58), usernames often display characteristics within the following fields: appearance, personality, occupation, hobby and other activities, origins, nationality, residence, status, kinship and other affiliations (Van Langendonck, 2007: 301-306; Sidorova, 2006: 95-96; Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003; Scheidt, 2001; Swennen, 2001: 97-136; Bechar-Israeli, 1995). Thus, we can say that they display information about the users, and are therefore characterised by ‘inference-richness’, an important property of membership categories. Another key attribute of membership categories are ‘category-bound activities’ perceived as characteristic of their members based on ‘commonsense knowledge’ (Schegloff, 2007a: 467-469; see pp. 83-84). This is also true for the usernames – sets of traits that might be associated with usernames, too.

In my analysis I will treat the attributes referred to in usernames (i.e. appearance, personality, occupation, etc.) as MCDs that we can use to arrange the categories displayed in usernames similarly to how other terms of categorisation are grouped

⁶¹ Unlike in Agyekum’s (2006: 213) research into Akan names where every child automatically receives a name based on the day when he or she was born, according to the Tupikov’s dictionary Saturday was the only day of the week referred to in Old Russian names.

into MCDs, as described earlier in this unit (Chapter 3). What MCDs are referred to in usernames in a specific community might be seen as one of the elements of constructing the scope of the shared knowledge about categories of users in this community. This will demonstrate the common aspects of identities that are presented by usernames.

According to Schegloff (1996: 465), ‘category terms for types of persons in a culture’s inventory’ may also work as terms of reference. Practices of referring to persons belong to two larger domains: description and word selection. Thus, from the viewpoint of word selection, a reference involves selecting an appropriate word. From the viewpoint of describing, a reference might be a form of description. When we choose to make a reference by the category term, we also describe (Schegloff, 2007a: 463). This applies to semantically transparent usernames: they are selected as terms of reference and address, and they also describe the named. Thus, username choice involves selecting the term to refer to a person (the named user), and this username will be understood by the audience by recognising possible descriptions.

In my analysis, rather than mapping ideas of classifications onto the gathered data, I will look for MCDs to sort the usernames into groups by recognising associated characteristics. This will show that usernames are not as clearly and easily classifiable as the classifications performed so far seem to suggest.

5.4.3. Usernames in *Posidelki* as terms of categorisation

In offline life, people are commonly categorised in relation to their bodily characteristics by a wide selection of terms used to describe them, such as: tall, big, towering, short, shorty, small, petite, tiny, wee, redhead, ginger, pretty, handsome, cute, attractive, ugly, stunning, gorgeous, average looking, medium-sized, bald, chrome dome, freckled, spotted, dotted, blondie, flaxen, fair-haired, train tracks (braces) and many more. Bodily characteristics are also often displayed in usernames. In *Posidelki*, for example, a group of usernames referring to nature, such as *Незабудка* ‘forget-me-not’, *вишенка* ‘little cherry’, *Belka2010* ‘squirrel’, *Лютик* ‘buttercup flower’ and *kalibri* ‘hummingbird’, connote bodily characteristics. They suggest such attributes as ‘pretty’, ‘decorative’, ‘cute’, ‘small’, ‘light’ and ‘delicate’.

Username *верба* [verba] ‘pussy-willow’ and *Iva* ‘willow’ could also be included in this group as they are recognised for their specific silhouettes and decorative catkins and may be read as referring to appearance. ‘Bodily characteristics’ can thus be used as an MCD in this case. This can be compared to how people are characterised by using terms that belong to common vocabulary. It is a widespread practice to use references to natural objects and phenomena and their attributes to illustrate bodily characteristics of the referee. In Russian, for example, one can be *долговязый как жираф* ‘lanky as a giraffe’ and *тонкий как тростинка* ‘thin as a reed’; a woman can be *стройная как рябинка* or *как газель* ‘svelte as a rowan-tree’ or ‘as a gazelle’. One may also have *волосы золотые как пшеница* ‘hair as golden as wheat’.

Category membership does not imply being categorisable by only one MCD. Just as category ‘baby’ belongs to a number of MCDs, e.g. ‘family’, ‘stage of life’ and ‘terms of endearment’ (Stokoe, 2012: 281), the above-mentioned terms of categorisation referring to nature may be used to express various aspects of identities. For example, *Belka2010* ‘squirrel’ may be thought of as ‘nimble’ that might be described as belonging to ‘physical abilities’. It is also common to compare people’s physical abilities with the natural world, e.g. *быстрый как ветер* or *как олень*, ‘fleet as the wind’ or ‘as a deer’, *зоркий как сокол* ‘sharp-sighted as a hawk’, *крепок как дуб* ‘strong as an oak-tree’, *слепой как крот* ‘blind as a mole’.

Characteristics related to personality and conduct may find their illustration in references to nature too, e.g., *трусливый как заяц* ‘timid as a hare’, *хитрый* or *лукав как лис* ‘crafty’ or ‘sly as a fox’, *преданный как собака* ‘faithful as a dog’, *холодный как снег* ‘cold as snow’, *храбрый как лев* ‘brave as a lion’ and *трудолюбивый как пчела* or *как муравей* ‘hardworking as a bee’ or ‘as an ant’. In *Posidelki*, *hameleonxxx* ‘chameleon’ may be associated with ‘appearance’ but also with changeability as an aspect of ‘personality’ that might be perceived as both positive (flexibility, adaptability) and negative (deceptive, unreliable person) trait. *Happy Free Bird* may suggest a direct reference to an idiomatic expression ‘free as a bird’⁶² that describes somebody who is carefree or free to do whatever they wish.

⁶² Also to a title of a song by The Beatles.

Birds may associate with freedom and joy due to their ability to fly. As in English, in which this username appears⁶³, ‘bird’ has also other, informal, meanings, i.e. ‘a particular type of person’ and ‘a young woman’⁶⁴, it may hint at playing on words. The username *pandagirl* may indicate some type of similarity to or fondness of pandas. *Мамба* ‘mamba’ and *Eagle* may be viewed as powerful, wild and dangerous predators. An eagle might also symbolise freedom, while a mamba is best known for its deadly venom; thus they may be seen as indicative of values and conduct. *Raduga* ‘rainbow’, *Вселенная* [vselennaia] ‘Universe’, *Air* and *Le Soleil* ‘The Sun’ might be associated with something beautiful and magnificent but also unreachable, distant or remote. The idea of remoteness of an astrological object is highlighted in username *Одинокая_звезда* [odinokaia zvezda] ‘lonely star’. Each of these usernames individually will also invoke a specific association related to unique qualities of these objects, e.g. the hotness and brightness of the Sun, necessity of air, or limitlessness of the Universe. Thus, these usernames might be categorisable in terms of ‘appearance’, ‘personality’, and ‘state of mind’, ‘temperament’ or ‘conduct’.

Individual participants may have also other ideas about how to categorise people with usernames referring to nature; for example, they might be thought of as fond of nature or enjoying spending time in nature, watching stars, or sunbathing, and thus as categorisable by MCDs ‘interests’ or ‘activities’. Nature is also a common source of various symbols, e.g. the Sun has been identified with deities in many cultures, an eagle is commonly used in heraldry, a rainbow is often associated with the LGBT movement and famous people are often referred to as stars. In any case, ‘nature’ constitutes a rich source of associations.

Qualities associated with various objects in our surroundings might also be interpreted as standing for various types of characteristics. Someone might be *тонкий, как нить* ‘thin as a thread’, *толстый как бочка* ‘round as a barrel’, *громкий, как барабан* ‘loud, like a drum’, *красивый как картинка* ‘pretty as a picture’ or *неподвижный, как столб* ‘still as a log’, and a woman might be *плоская*

⁶³ Language choice will be discussed in Section 4.4.3.A.

⁶⁴ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bird>

как доска ‘flat as a board’. Non-physical phenomena and abstract notions and concepts might also serve as sources to characterise people, e.g. *прекрасна как мечта* ‘beautiful like a dream’, *бледный, как смерть* ‘pale as death’. The characterisation may be based not just on comparison (simile and metaphor) but also on substitution (metonymy and synecdoche), where an object or a phenomenon stands for a person related to it. We may say, for example, that an individual is somebody’s ‘right arm’, ‘eyes’ or ‘ears’, use ‘pen’ to refer to a writer, ‘crown’ for a royal person, ‘guitar’ for a guitar player, ‘soprano’ for a soprano singer, or ‘attack’ and ‘defence’ for athletes in team sports; etc. This is a common strategy in usernames, too. In Bechar-Israeli’s (1995) sample, many usernames related to media and technology, which reflected the fact that many chat users had computer-related jobs. As Stommel (2007: 143-144) explains, these usernames ‘do not only denote medium/technology, but also “do” the occupational identity of participants’. We can also do the opposite, i.e. say that a person stands for some quality, feeling, value, etc., e.g. that one is *воплощение любви, доброты, зла*, ‘embodiment of love’, ‘goodness’, ‘evil’.

In *Posidelki*, *Melodia* ‘melody’ may connote one’s characteristics, e.g. a pleasant, harmonious personality, as well as activities related to music that can bring to mind someone who likes music, plays instruments or sings, which refers to ‘interest’, ‘profession’ or ‘activities’. *~Грубая_Нежность~* [grubaia nezhnost’] ‘rough tenderness’ is redolent of ‘category-activity puzzles’ that present certain categories as unexpected performers of some actions, such as ‘Killer Nuns!’, which is often used in jokes and in gender marking, e.g. ‘women drivers’, ‘male nurse’ (Stokoe, 2012: 281). *Анализ* [analiz] ‘analysis’ may refer to a chemical reaction or process of reasoning. Thus, it may, amongst other things, bring to mind professions related to chemistry or requiring analytical thinking, or analytical thinking as a skill. *Секунда* [sekunda] ‘a second’⁶⁵ might bring up various associations related to the shortness of this time unit, such as that someone is fast or punctual, or perhaps some activities related to time or time measuring. *Пирамидка* [piramidka] ‘small/little pyramid’ may be a reference to the ancient construction combined with an affection, or

⁶⁵ Does not refer to ‘the second’, i.e. ‘the one after first’.

perhaps irony, but may also bring to mind some small pyramid-shaped objects, like a toy. The username *шлямбур* [shliambur] (an element of climbing equipment) might be associated with ‘hobby’. *VILKA* ‘fork’ is a tool one uses to eat, to spear, but also a chess tactic (or setting), so it may evoke a person that has to do with these activities in some way; *Wilo4ka* [vilochka] ‘little fork’ seems similar, just with different expressive value due to its diminutive form. The username *kislota* ‘acid’, despite other meanings, is likely to first of all suggest the drug LSD, and may evoke a drug user or distributor. *Moonshine* may evoke a producer or an amateur of the drink, or perhaps a person with a temperament as if they drank it.

In this group, a considerable number of usernames are derived from English. *~Lovely_Love~* might be associated with the ‘embodiment’ of love or with experiencing love, *easyeas* may bring to mind someone who is casual and easy-going or who feels relaxed and at ease. *Energy+* and *eNENeRGY* might be indicative of people who are energetic in general or who feel energised at that moment. *SMILE* and *smile1* may stand for a personality or current emotional state, too. *†DarkNess†* may also be associated with a state of mind; ‘dark’ is a common term to characterise something as negative or pessimistic. *Sunday* is internationally known as a day off work and may connote leisure; thus, it may suggest a person who is ‘like Sunday’, i.e. laidback or perhaps lazy, or someone who likes Sundays. *Silk* might bring associations with something smooth and soft, or something expensive; *needle* might be associated with a person who uses needles (like a nurse), or has some characteristics that are linked to needles (e.g. is as thin or as sharp as a needle); and *miror* ‘mirror’ might refer to its ability to reflect things as they are, as in the saying: *Что на зеркало пенять, коли рожа крива* ‘Don’t blame the mirror for your ugly mug’. It is also common to describe eyes as ‘the mirror of the soul’.

Feelings and other phenomena may also express relations, e.g. one might be called ‘somebody’s love’, ‘somebody’s destiny’, ‘somebody’s dream’ or ‘somebody’s life’. In the username *^Your Obsession^* the named takes a position in relation to somebody, in *MyDoom* the named refers to something or somebody else’s position towards them, and *antiMiracle* may indicate a stance in relation to the phenomenon itself. Other usernames that might be included into the group of everyday vocabulary

are: *secret555*, *Overkill*, *SKI*, *stop*, *simple-words*, *scarsopen*, *Fluid*, *-inception*, *Bag*, *SENSOR* and *you6907*. They may be used to categorise people into various MCDs: ‘appearance’, ‘personality’, ‘state of mind’, ‘activities’, ‘bodily characteristics’, and others. Again, the interpretations may vary; some users may, for example, associate them with titles, citations, etc. The usage of English may disturb the reading for those who do not know English. On the other hand, Internet access gives a possibility for instant translation. Additionally, some of these words sound similar to Russian (obsession, secret, stop, energy) while others are often recognised even by those who do not speak English (love, smile).

Some usernames may name the characteristics directly, such as *NastyGirl*, *Beauty*, *blind*, *Plaksa* ‘crybaby’, *LovingHeart*, *Сероглазая* [seroglazaia] ‘grey-eyed’, *рыжая* [ryzhaia] ‘readhead’, *molod* ‘young’, *Шалена* [shalena] ‘crazy’, *Строптив@я* [stroptivaia] ‘obstinate’ and *Пушистая* [pushistaia] ‘fluffy, soft’, but will not always be read literally. For example, *blind* may be read as a metaphor, while *Пушистая* may recall the phraseologism *белый и пушистый* ‘white and soft’, which is used to describe a person who is entirely innocent, of high morals, ‘lily-white’.

Another important aspect of culture used as a source of terms to characterise the people are religion and its important element – mythology. In *Posidelki*, *SainT*, *святой* [sviatoi] ‘saint’, *White Angel*, *~Sweet_Angel~*, *Ангел* ‘Angel’, *~Angel~*, *REALGOD* and *Небесное Создание* [nebesnoe sozдание] ‘heavenly creature’ might be seen as references to Christianity, and thus might be included in this group. ‘Angel’ is commonly used to address or refer to a person of pleasant appearance or personality; in addition, the colour white stands for many positive connotations, e.g. it symbolises purity and innocence, and angels are often imagined in white. Similarly, ‘sweet’ (in *~Sweet_Angel~*) in English (in which this username appears) can be used to indicate nice looks or a kind personality. Somebody who is particularly righteous may be called a ‘saint’; also, ‘heavenly creature’ might be used as an appellation for someone of ‘unearthly’ good qualities, while ‘god’ could describe someone who is unbeatably skilled in something, referring to God’s omniscience, as in *В электронике он бог* ‘In electronics he’s a god’. But it should

be noted that this kind of username (while certainly not just this one) might have a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ quality.

In *Posidelki*, we can also find references to figures from religions and mythologies other than Christianity: *Osiris*, ~Шу~, *Пандора*, *ariadna*, *Rigveda* and *Kali13666*. There is also *jama*, which might be read as a transcription of either Яма [yama], as a Hindu god, or Джама [jama], as a name. As ancient Greek and Egyptian gods do not seem to have any followers nowadays, we can assume that references to them are likely to be read as references to fictional characters. However, *Rigveda* and *Kali13666*, and possibly *jama*, may refer to Hindu as a contemporary religion.

References to mythology may be read as an indication of interests; if a username refers to mythology associated with a currently existing religion, it may also indicate its follower and bring up beliefs and values promoted by this religion. If a specific figure is referred to, it may be received as an indication of some kind of similarity or appreciation of attributes characteristic of this figure. It is in general a common strategy to characterise people by comparing them to commonly recognisable figures and characters, as in ‘new Einstein’, ‘Polish Brad Pitt’⁶⁶ and ‘Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District’⁶⁷. If someone is named after a person, this may express aspirations to be like that figure. In *Posidelki*, there are a number of usernames that refer to persons and characters. Some of them are widely recognised even to those who are not interested in the specific field, for example because their names, and often also images, circulate in the public sphere, e.g. in media or literature. *Shakira*, *Keisha* and *brihanna* are examples of usernames that refer to singers who are also widely known celebrities. They may correspond to a taste for specific kind of music as well as self-presentation. *Hitsugi*, also a musician, may indicate interests, too, but will not be recognised by as wide an audience as the former. *Ду* [di] may refer to ‘Lady Di’, who was also often commented on in the media, in terms of both conduct and style. *Тарантино* [tarantino] may be read as an indication of what type of films one prefers, while *Audrey Tautou* might have been selected for both her performance and

⁶⁶ About Maciej Zakościelny due to a physical resemblance

⁶⁷ A novel by Nikolai Leskov

her own characteristics. The historical figures, such as *kaligyla* and *JannaDark88*, may be associated with their most renowned actions or personal qualities – although these specific usernames do not reproduce the names precisely. *Chanel* is probably best known as a fashion brand and associated with a specific taste for attire and cosmetics, while *coco*, although it may suggest the same referent, as a reference to the first name rather than actual brand name may be more likely to bring up the image of a person.

References to the names of other persons may thus categorise people in terms of interests, appearance, values, conduct and aspirations, which may also be indicative of personality, and may be read as indicating role models. References to fictional characters from books and films may have analogous effects. Similarly, some of them will be widely recognised, such as *ЭркюльПуаро* ‘Hercule Poirot’, *СанчоПансо* ‘Sancho Panza’, *werter124*, *Гермиона* ‘Hermione’, *AnnaKarenina* and *ДюЙмОвОчка* ‘Thumbelina’. Others may be known to members of a specific culture, language group, society, age group, groups pursuing shared interests and activities, etc., such as *Ассоль* [assol’], *Фрося Бурлакова* [frosia burlakova], *Frosty* (perhaps ‘Frosty the Snowman’), *misterX* and *Лиса алиса* [lisa alisa] ‘Alisa the fox’.

References to figures and creatures known from mythology and literature may, in addition, be made in popular culture, for example in films and computer games: *Smiling Spectre*, *Sirin*, *liliputka* ‘female Lilliput’, *kelpie* and *Вампирша* [vampirsha] ‘female vampire’. Additionally, these creatures typically carry some specific attributes and might be used to characterise people, e.g. a short person may be called ‘a lilliput’, or people who are perceived as emotionally abusive and ‘drain’ others’ energy might be called ‘energy vampires’. These usernames may thus be associated with ‘personal characteristics’ as well as ‘interests’ and ‘activities’.

A specific type of username comprises those related to the phenomena of fandom and subculture, grouped around specific computer games, comic series, films and film series, and others (e.g. *Atagachi*, *RiptoR*, *Inyasha*, *Харуко* [kharuko], *харука* [kharuka], *Vuky* ‘Wookie’ and *DARTVENOM*⁶⁸). Many users, unfamiliar with the

⁶⁸ Reference to Darth Vader, a ‘Star Wars’ character, and possibly to Venom, a heavy metal band.

specific topic, genre, etc., might not be able to recognise what they refer to, whereas the ones who are part of a specific group will be able to not just recognise the fellow members, but also associate them with sets of attributes. Also some references to names of music bands (e.g. *AKADO*, *Electrovamp*, and possibly *Психея* ‘Psyche’, †*DarkNess*† and *Overkill*) might not be known to a wide audience. They indicate interests, and may trigger images of a specific appearance and conduct, as well as values. Brand names, such as *Chanel*, *Activia*, *Chupa-Chups*, *MARTINI*, *Malibu*, and possibly *Bench* and *Melexis* may generate associations with various aspects of identity: appearance, interests, values and other things related to lifestyle. Also, some of them might not be known to those unfamiliar with the specific product or brand.

Geographical names may be read as suggestions of places of origin, current stay, favourite holiday destinations and other places. Again, while *Africa* and *Malibu* will probably be familiar to everyone, not everybody may know that *Lemberg* in German is the name of Lvov, or that *patras* may refer to a Greek town. *Plussa*, on the other hand, may also evoke the Treaty of Plussa. Other examples are: *Sakartvelo* (autonym for Georgia), *zhukovka* and *Almata*. References to locations may work to recognise locals as well as may trigger location related stereotypes. The stereotypes might relate to nationality, region within the country, specific cities, people living in a specific type of location, e.g. city vs. village, and others. Ethnonyms and demonyms, such as *tatar*, *Aziatka* ‘Asian’, *Syamka93*, *красноярочка* ‘Krasnoiarsk dweller’ may have a similar effect. Stereotypes related to ethnicity and nationality are common and are often reflected in sayings, anecdotes, etc., e.g. *Незванный гость хуже татарина* ‘Uninvited guest is worse than Tatar’, *Хохол*⁶⁹ *глупее вороны, а хитрее черта* ‘Ukrainian is stupider than crow, but slier than devil’, *Хохол не соврет, да и правды не скажет* ‘Ukrainian won’t lie and won’t tell the truth either’.

There are also usernames derived directly from vocabulary related to status, roles, professions and other activities. People are commonly categorised in terms of the social roles they fulfil, jobs they have, interests they pursue and other activities they engage in, that indicate their place in the social matrix. These usernames might

⁶⁹ *Хохол* [khokhol] – ethnic slur for Ukrainians

suggest aspirations or the importance of a particular role to the username bearer. In addition, the names of these activities often gain secondary meanings based on sets of attributes ascribed to their performers. For example, the username @RTi\$T might indicate a ‘profession’ or ‘interests’, but artists are also a subject to stereotypes about their image, i.e. that they are eccentric (in one way or another) individuals in terms of both appearance and conduct. Someone who behaves in certain way (e.g. performs actions referred to as ‘acting’ or ‘dramatising’) may be called an artist. Thus, the name for a profession might also be associated with ‘conduct’, ‘personality’ and ‘appearance’.

Username in this group, such as *Форумчиха* [forumchikha] ‘forumer’ *LariSKA gitaristka* ‘Lariska the guitarist’, *Лилия мама* [lilia mama] and *Mère Susie* ‘Mother Susie’ might be read as direct indications of a ‘role’, ‘interest’, ‘profession’ or other ‘activity’. They generate concepts of specific categories, e.g. ‘mother’ labels a female family member that corresponds to a specific role and attributes, but is also a source of countless metaphors and secondary associations. *GiRl* and *kid09* may reflect young age, but also conduct or personality. *Гость* [gost’], ‘guest’ may be read as an indication of a ‘status’ in various contexts: as a visitor to a forum, a stranger to some place, a foreigner, a special guest, a guest who might be welcome or unwelcome, and others; *ветеран* [veteran] may be read directly, but also as someone experienced in other activities. *Lady* and *Дамочка* [damochka] ‘little lady’ also refer to ‘status’, but these terms may evoke the whole picture of a person including ‘conduct’, ‘mannerism’, ‘appearance’ and ‘attire’. Additionally, *дамочка* is used as an ironic or condescending term of reference and address.

Executioner is rather unlikely to indicate an actual job; similarly, *Уличная_Хулиганка* [ulichnaia khuliganka] ‘street hooligan’ might not be perceived as a delinquent female strictly speaking or *Корсар10000* [korsar] ‘corsair’ as a sea thief. Perhaps choosing this type of username will be read as indicative of ‘conduct’, ‘personality’ or ‘interests’. *Создатель Миров* [sozdatel’ mirov] ‘creator of worlds’ and *Царица Ирина* [tsaritsa irina] ‘tsarina Irene’ could be perceived as demonstrating an aspiration to a high ‘status’, which may also suggest a ‘personality’ type. *Jester* will also be read in terms of ‘status’, ‘role’ or ‘conduct’. *Пилигримм*

[pilgrim] ‘pilgrim’, *lunatic* ‘sleepwalker’ and *Скиталец* [skitalets] ‘wanderer’ may connote aspects of ‘personality’ or ‘state of mind’. These usernames may also be read in other ways; some of them may be hinting at titles or characters from books, films, songs, games that someone may recognise (e.g. *The Corsair* by Lord Byron). However, they are not as apparent as, for example, *AnnaKarenina* or other references to books and films described before.

In social space, terms also circulate that are used specifically as appellations for certain categories of people. Some usernames in *Posidelki* refer to such concepts, e.g. *Chainik*⁷⁰ ‘dummy’ (a person who is ignorant in some field), *Sterv@* ‘bitch’, *Кралья* [kralia] ‘a darling, a bird’, *Alpha_Dog* and *JoeJock2007*. They may invoke combinations of characteristics related to appearance, behaviour, activities, personality and other aspects, and carry derogatory overtones. They may be seen as used in a humorous way, or as bragging.

The group of usernames that look like abbreviations, or some kinds of novel formations, are probably understandable only to the named, or perhaps to a group of people familiar with these formations, e.g. *groes77*, *k.bl.s.O.*, *BAR55911*, *turpb*, *suc95*, *stra111*, *rps*, *PR*, *LAX*, *acz*, *arv* and *ntu1108*. Others look like random letters and numbers that were not meant to carry any meaning: *34562* and *aaaa*.

Finally, usernames as *Noname*, *newalias*, *Prosto_YA* ‘just me’, *ЧеловекБезИмени* [chelovek bez imeni] ‘man without name’ and *без имени* [bez imeni] ‘without name’ may read as meta-comments on naming and anonymity.

5.4.3.A. Language choice in usernames

Language choice in usernames might be perceived as meaningful and users may be categorised on the basis of the language they choose for their usernames. Based on the literature to date, the following tendencies related to language choice in usernames have found their confirmation in *Posidelki*:

⁷⁰ This username will be discussed in detail in the case study

- Language diversity in usernames is greater than in conversations (Stommel, 2007: 151; Androutsopoulos, 2006: 539)

Although Russian is the only language of communication in *Posidelki*, a number of usernames have been derived from other languages: notably English, but also French (*Le Soleil, Mère Susie*), Italian (*cattiva*), Spanish (*Amigo*), Ukrainian (*Шалена*) and Japanese (*Katashi, Inyasha, Самото [samoto], Yonaki*). There are also hybrid formations, such as *Glamik* (glamour + -ik), *bodiartik* (body + art + -ik) and *Джуси Фрутка* [juicy fruitka] (juicy fruit + -ka).

- Language choice may be used to construct national and ethnic identities (Androutsopoulos, 2006: 525, 539)

Usernames of non-Russian origins that are most likely to activate national and ethnic categorisation in *Posidelki* are the Ukrainian *Шалена* [shalena], ‘crazy’ as well as usernames derived from names that may indicate Russian speakers of non-Russian ethnicity, possibly from former Soviet republics of Muslim traditions (*amira, Farida, faruh, mahmud, maksat, Nurbek*). Other usernames of foreign origins may be read as indicating the current residence of diaspora members. Usernames of Japanese origins, on the other hand, might be seen as evincing an interest in Japanese culture.

- Where English is not the language of communication, it is still a popular source for usernames (Androutsopoulos, 2006: 541; Sidorova, 2006: 96)

In *Posidelki*, English is definitely the most popular choice among all usernames of non-Russian origin: in total, over a hundred were derived from English. It is doubtful that these usernames will be read by the audience as expressions of national identities; it is more likely that they will be seen as a reflection of the influence of English on Internet communication globally, or the contemporary trend to use English in general.

5.4.4. Summary

This analysis demonstrates how usernames might be viewed as terms of categorisation that characterise the people similarly to common vocabulary. In

Posidelki, we can observe references to various fields of common knowledge embedded in both Russian and international cultures: nature, religion, history, mythology, literature and popular culture, as well as phenomena from everyday life. These references are made to fields of shared knowledge of different extents: some may be common interculturally, some may be limited to a specific culture or language speakers, and others may extend beyond a specific language or culture and unite international groups of common interests.

There are a considerable number of MCDs that may be activated to categorise people by their usernames in terms of: physical characteristics, which might include appearance/ physiognomy, physical abilities and age, personality and temperament as well as state of mind, feelings and emotions, conduct, lifestyle and behaviour, values, views and beliefs, aspirations, activities including hobbies and other interests, profession, role and status, as well as skills and intellectual abilities, and style and attire. Some of them, as suggested by Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008), may bring up images of bodies, while others may suggest types of personalities, an inner world, a place in the social structure and other aspects of identity.

Language choice, next to semantics of usernames, might be another means of categorisation. In line with Androutsopoulos' (2006) findings, in *Posidelki*, the language diversity in usernames is greater than in conversations, and derivations from English are particularly numerous.

In *Posidelki*, no omnirelevant MCDs seem to be observable that in the themed environments, where a specific type of audience is targeted, might be determined by the common purpose of communication, such as in Stommel (2007). This is reflected in usernames by fact that there seems to be no central type or concept of identity that is enacted through usernames.

In general, the majority of usernames enable various associations and interpretations, which may present a challenge to researchers. In geographically unrestricted CMC, one may encounter usernames of diverse socio-cultural origins. They might be personal, referring to motifs from an individual's life, may come from highly specialised domains familiar only to insiders, or be derived from jargon or slang;

others might combine languages or contain abbreviations, misspellings and other alterations. As a result, interpretation, classification, coding and other tasks might be difficult. This is why ethnomethodology is a suitable approach: because, first, rather than making the data fit into our model of classification, it encourages looking for information that can actually be found. Second, assuming the participant's perspective makes the analyst aware that there might not be one correct classification and the one performed by them is just one of many, no more valid than any other.

5.5. Usernames and relational categories

As Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 70) explain, there are various types of categories that people might be ascribed to. Some of them are defined by the relationships between the community members, such as 'employer – employee'. In everyday life, people operate various forms of names and other terms of address and reference to construct and demonstrate their understanding of these interpersonal relationships. They choose how to introduce themselves, how to address their interlocutors and how to refer to other parties. They may also reflect on how they are addressed and how they would like to be addressed. The functioning of this system is 'the result of complex social negotiations, learned, interpreted, and reified through socialization', as Leslie and Skipper (1990: 273) explain. They continue, 'We learn at a young age how we are to call others. Transgression of acceptable naming traditions established by a group may be met with negative sanction.' Names are amongst the important tools to construct and negotiate relational identities: the choice amongst acceptable options imposes a specific scope of potential responses and in this way shapes the character of relationship (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2006: 9).

While etymologically transparent usernames characterise the named by associations activated by their semantics, when selecting certain forms of customary names as their usernames, users refer to practices of referring and addressing that they know from the offline reality. By their choice between (readily available or modified) variants of customary names, users present their offers of relationships for others to react to.

5.5.1. Categorisation by referring and addressing

Alford (1987: 118) has observed that ‘naming practices are more than mere indexes or symptoms of social perceptions. Frequently, they are active forces in creating these perceptions’.

In everyday life, names are part of the system of terms of address and reference, which reflects and supports the system of roles and relationships between the members of a population. The study of address and reference practices enables observation of how social networks function and how they change over time, as well as of relationship between individuals involved in the specific interaction (Griffin, 2010: 364). Nicolaisen (1999) gives an illustrative account of how personal names and other terms of address used in a single life by both the named and others express and construct identities emergent from relationships experienced by individuals throughout their lives. During his ‘70 years of meandering, shaping and reshaping’, his identity evolved from *Wilhelm Fritz Hermann Nicolaisen* on his birth certificate, to *Klein-Willi, Putzi, der kleine Willi, Nico, Nicola, Wilhelm, Willem, Billy, Bill, Onkel Willi, Willie Nick, Nickey, Uilleam MacNeacail, Nicolaisen, Wilhelm F.H. Nicolaisen, W.F.H. Nicolaisen, Uncle Bill, Big Bad Bill, Bill Nicolaisen, Willi Nicolaisen, Wilhelm Nicolaisen, Dr. Nicolaisen, Professor Nicolaisen and Professor*, as well as *Guardian, Dad, Daddy* and *Opa*. As he puts it:

It is this variety of names that I have been called over the years by different people, in different situations, in different languages, in different registers, that have shaped me as a person during that time, have made me and labelled me (...) (1999: 179).

Names are one of the means to perform these identities in the way that various competing forms and their relations to each other are employed to establish and negotiate relational categories for the involved individuals (Callary, 2008: 195).⁷¹

⁷¹ In fact, according to Callary (2008: 195-196), only given names have a capacity of developing various forms that can be related to one another, while family names ‘are of little value sociolinguistically since at any given time they are invariant and there are no competing choices among forms’. In my opinion, each personal name should be considered as a whole, single unit, including all its elements, as it is socially indicative of not only how one of the elements behaves, but also how all the elements work with each other, i.e. appear and disappear, or change order.

The role of names might also find its expression in the way they are combined with, or when they are avoided and replaced by other terms, such as kin terms (*mother, sister, pa, dad*), non-kin role terms (*doctor, officer, judge*), and honorific or respect terms (*Mr, Ms, Sir, Your Honour*). The difference between personal names and role terms, general appellations, honorifics, etc. in this process lies in the fact that the former indicate addressing an individual, while the latter address a role occupant or category member; combinations of the two suggests that some fusion of these effects is desired (Alford, 1987: 98).

The social etiquette (which includes terms of reference and address) is highly standardised, or, as Formanovskaia (2003: 9) puts it, ritualised. But also, or perhaps even because of this, it has a potential for great expressivity.

In general, the decision about an appropriate form of address and/or reference is likely to be based on the following factors (Griffin, 2010: 371):

- speaker's relationship to the referent
- speaker's relationship to the addressee
- relationship between the addressee and the referent
- presence of overhearers including the referent
- what the speaker wishes to express about the referent and their relationship

These relationships tend to be perceived in two aspects: familiarity vs. distance and individual vs. role: in the person-to-person mode of a relationship, role expectations are absent, minimal or negotiable, while in a role-dominated relationship, role expectations are traditional, constraining and nonnegotiable (Alford, 1987: 159-160).

Alford (1987: 118) recognises three models of social situations that frame the context in which the choice of term is made:

- Interaction between peers or intimates – often involves the use of personal names and is characterised by flexibility and negotiability; with sufficient intimacy interlocutors may play with names and use diminutives, invented forms and nicknames.

- Interaction between individuals of unequal positions in the social hierarchy – if the names are allowed, their use is typically asymmetrical: only allowed to superiors, while subordinates are required to use either role or respect terms, or names combined with role or respect terms, unless the higher status person invites the use of a more familiar term.
- Interaction between members of insider and outsider groups – typically, the outsider group would adjust to the system of address of the insiders, but they also may reject it and in this way refuse to redefine their identities.⁷²

According to Sal'mon (2002: 29), four aspects of social relationships are expressed by address and reference:

- Official/non-official context,
- Socio-professional hierarchy,
- Age-related hierarchy,⁷³
- Presence/absence of the referent.

Gladrow (2008: 40-41) indicates that selection of available terms typically includes distancing and familiarising options, for example:

- Distancing option with a familiar person: *Людмила Сергеевна, познакомьтесь с моим сыном, его зовут Борис.* 'Liudmila Sergeevna, please, meet my son, his name is Boris.'
- Distancing option with an unfamiliar person: *Молодой человек, Вы забыли зонтик.* 'Young man, you have forgotten your umbrella.'
- Familiarising option with a familiar person: *Петя, иди сюда.* 'Petia, come here.'

⁷² It should be noted that cultural differences may cause misunderstandings that are not meant as acts of deliberate resistance.

⁷³ Although in Russian there is no age-related name change as in some cultures, there are some signs of such change, e.g. usage of a patronymic would normally only apply to adult referents – unless used for example ironically (Sal'mon, 2002: 35, 42; Poliakova, 1975: 150-151).

- Familiarising option with an unfamiliar person: *Привет, красавица, телефончик не дашь?* ‘Hi, gorgeous, why don’t you give me your phone number?’

Other factors that may affect the choice include whether the communication is public or private and oral or written. There might also be some local differences. The choice may also be emotionally charged (Gladrow, 2008: 40-42).

Usage of address terms is culture-specific, and constitutes a particularly sensitive indicator of social, cultural and political change, because they:

stand apart from the rest of linguistic structure, by the fact that, of all aspects of language, it is the one that most directly encodes interpersonal attitudes among interlocutors. Hence it is highly charged emotionally and politically, and it has on this account been more subject than most aspects of language to cultural valuation (Joseph, 1989: 856).

In Russian, using names constitutes an important element of interaction; they are typically repeated several times during the conversation to indicate attention and engagement. We can say that when communicating in Russian, one should follow the rule: ‘If you know the name of your interlocutor, use it’ (Krongauz, 2009: 25).

In Russian, interlocutors can choose between three components: a given name, a patronymic and a surname, e.g. *Владимир Владимирович Путин* ‘Vladimir (given name) Vladimirovich (patronym) Putin (surname)’. Given names denote a person as an individual while surnames and patronymics are typically shared with some other members of the family and encode the individual’s place within the kin system (Finch, 2008). These components may be used separately or jointly. For example, a student would typically use a name and a patronymic in relation to a university professor, while using a single given name, not to mention its informal form, would be inappropriate – while it is fine amongst English speakers (Sal’mon, 2002: 33-34). In general, using names as terms of address in inter-cultural settings might be a ‘potentially delicate interactional moment’ (Bargiela et al., 2002) that may also occur between speakers of the same language that are of different cultural backgrounds,

e.g. between Georgians, who tend to proceed to given names fast, and Russians, who in similar situations prefer a name with a patronymic (Bargiela et al., 2002)⁷⁴.

In Russian, the terms of reference and address are amongst the important indicators of the shift in interpersonal relationships after the transformation from the communist to the capitalist system, accompanied by general globalisation, development of new instruments of mediated communication such as email and SMS, and related foreign influences. In the new socio-political conditions, much doubt and confusion arose regarding the issue of appropriate address forms. How to address strangers politely but not pretentiously and without ideological overtones; how to address police officers or politicians; and what terms of address are appropriate in court or in official Internet communication such as customer services are amongst the situations where the universal standards have not yet been established or are in the process of institutional or customary implementation (Zhukova, 2013, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2010; Krongauz, 2009: 25).

A recent change in using names as terms of address has been witnessed by Krongauz (2009: 26). To illustrate it, he proposes division of Russian given names into two following groups:

- Names whose full form is neutral while used by itself (i.e. without patronymics or surnames) as they do not form neutral informal variants, for example Андрей (Andrei), Антон (Anton), Максим (Maksim), Никита (Nikita), Вера (Vera), Нина (Nina), Марина (Marina).

⁷⁴ Bargiela et al. (2002) cites the following example: ‘when one of the Georgian contributors to this article was staying at a hospital in Moscow, she wished to signal her friendliness towards the young woman doctor who was standing in for the professor/consultant who was treating her, and she therefore asked her if she could address her informally, (in Russian):

A: *mèzna j' vas budu nazivat' galicka ?* ‘May I call you "Galichka"?’ (The informal form for *Galina*)

B: *net, pèzaluísta* ‘No, please, don’t’

This use of the informal diminutive would have been appropriate in Georgian. The doctor rejected this, as in Russian this would have been seen as insufficiently deferential.’

- Names that were not typically used as single names in their full form before, because their shortened versions were considered neutral, such as: Александр/Саша, Шура (Aleksandr/Sasha, Shura), Владимир/Володя (Vladimir/Volodia), Дмитрий/Дима, Митя (Dmitrii/Dima, Mitia), Михаил/Миша (Mikhail/Misha), Анна/Аня (Anna/Ania), Екатерина/Катя (Ekaterina/Katia), Елена/Лена (Elena/Lena), Марья/Маша, Маруся (Maria/Masha, Marusia), Надежда/Надя (Nadezhda/Nadia).

Before, if the names from the latter group had been used in their full variant as a form of address or self-reference, it would have been found pretentious and unnatural; they were only used with patronymics. However, this has changed recently: the sphere of using patronymics seems to have narrowed and virtually disappeared from the areas where the foreign influence is the strongest, such as business (including business partners and management), and replaced by a new neutral official form of address, a single given name. In these circumstances, shortened names became too familiar, and have been replaced by the full variant. A similar phenomenon has been observed in media: instead of a given name combined with a patronymic, a single given name in its full variant is used, mostly in combination with the formal pronoun *вы* [vy], although the informal *ты* [ty] is also not uncommon (Zhukova, 2011c).

Thus, we can say that terms of address and reference serve to establish relational categories in terms of distance and familiarity, hierarchical symmetry or asymmetry, and personal and emotional attitude. The categorising work is done by choosing amongst available terms in reference to socio-cultural background as well as common knowledge that might be shared amongst various groups of people, from speakers of the same language to couples in a romantic relationship.

5.5.2. Usernames in the form of conventional names

On the Internet as a medium and communication tool, standards of communicative behaviour do not seem to differ enough from those offline to be considered an autonomous system. They are adjusted to a specific environment, i.e. different for casual communication than academic or business; additional norms may be

introduced when necessary (Krongauz, 2009: 29). CMC combines oral and written characteristics of communication (Herring, 2011) as well as its private and public character (Hudson and Bruckman, 2004).

Usernames that serve as customary terms of address and reference are selected before interaction takes place and thus before the character of potential relationships is established. Additionally, in unofficial CMC, participants are free to choose their own usernames, so technically it is the addressees' initiative to choose the address terms. Usernames can therefore be compared to 'presentation names', namely, 'the name form or forms by which we call ourselves and by which we present ourselves to our various publics' (Callary, 2008: 196). These names are used to support certain types of relationships in public discourse and media; for example, public figures, such as politicians, may use informal names as a means of 'promoting an ideal image, one which they felt was perceived by the general public as familiar and unpretentious, even folksy, but at the same time one which exuded trustworthiness, steadfastness, and common sense' (Callary, 2008: 197). First names are also used as address terms to simulate the intimacy of casual conversation in specific television and radio programmes (McCarthy and O'Keeffe, 2003: 153).

Although usernames derived from ordinary names occur in most studied environments of CMC, sometimes in a significant proportion, they have received less attention than invented usernames as tools of identity performance (e.g. in Sidorova, 2006: 95; Lev and Lewinsky, 2004; Scheidt, 2001; Bechar-Israeli, 1995). This might be due to the opinion that those who choose them for their usernames fail to use the opportunity to construct their virtual identities creatively (Lev and Lewinsky, 2004), and that etymologically transparent names in general have greater potential to carry socio-cultural meanings. As stated by Tsepikova (2012: 105) in relation to nicknames: 'Descriptive nicknames reflect culture directly, by connecting or comparing the properties of objects. Non-descriptive nicknames lack linguo-cultural potential on the motivational level (...).'

Distribution of this type of username varies from one study to another. For example, in Bechar-Israeli's (1995) sample of usernames excerpted from IRC, 7.8% of usernames were derived from personal names, while in Lev and Lewinsky's (2004)

sample excerpted from ‘4 different internet tools: forums, chat rooms and popular Israeli portals, Israeli chat instant messaging program “Odigo” and IRC’ – 42.8%. They also vary in form – they might be derived from given names, surnames, or both; they may refer to official, familiar forms, foreign equivalents of given names, initials and other non-standard derivations, as in the examples given in Kołodziejczyk (2004: 147-152), Swennen (2001: 106-108) and Rutkiewicz (1999: 118-121): *katarzynazawada* – Katarzyna Zawada, *Garbul* – Garbulski (surname), *Tomjab* – Tomasz Jabłoński, *fee* – Eef (reversed given name), *Fox* – De Vos (English translation of Dutch surname). They may also be combined with other elements, such as other names, digits, non-alphabetic symbols and common vocabulary. Their visual form may also be altered, e.g. *MiReK*, *An25na*, *Dejvid* ‘David’, *Kashia* ‘Kasia’, *YOUstyna* ‘Justyna’, *Ren@t@*, *ERYKK*, *Ola_Ola* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003).

Swennen (2001: 39-50) has conducted a survey based on a semi-structured questionnaire that concerned the reason for the username choice as well as its use online and offline. It was available from a website that was set up specifically for this purpose, and was advertised through the University of Leuven intranet as well as popular Belgian commercial IRC channels, chatrooms, newsgroups and forums, e.g. #1li, #2li, #politica, #studiobrusseel, #topradio, #belgium, #vlaanderen, be.education, Humo, VT4 and digikids. The analysis of demographics in terms of age and gender (Swennen, 2001: 106-108) has revealed that women more often used official (6.6%) and expressive (6.1%) forms of names than men (4.6% and 3.3% respectively), while males used non-standard derivations more often (11.3%) than females (3.8%). Also, the older the users, the more often they used official names, e.g. 2.6% of 12 to 18-year-olds used them, while in the group of 35 and older, the figure was 20%. Expressive forms of names were most often used by 18 to 26-year-olds (4.9%), and non-standard derivations by 26 to 35-year-old users (14.3%).

The following reasons have been reported to motivate some Internet users to refrain from inventing their usernames and select conventional names⁷⁵ instead: they find that these names suit them best (Swennen, 2001: 106), for their aesthetic value (Van Langendonck, 2007: 300-303), to advertise their true selves (Scheidt, 2001), to

⁷⁵ Irrespective of whether or not they are users’ real names

indicate gender in dating chatrooms (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008: 258), and to indicate honesty and reliability in discussion groups (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 87).

On the other hand, personal names may function on the Internet in contrast to invented usernames. As alternative terms of address they may play a context-indicating role: participants may change terms of address to indicate a shift in the character of the interaction. For example, participants who use pseudonymous usernames and know each other's real names may switch to them to frame the conversation as serious in contrast to the playful interaction under the usernames (Jacobson, 1996: 469), or to highlight the personal character of the conversation (Sidorova, 2006: 21-22).

5.5.3. Conventional names in *Posidelki*

In *Posidelki*, almost half of participants derived their usernames from various forms of personal names⁷⁶. Amongst all usernames derived from conventional names, the most frequently have been used given names in their standard form – 45.3%, which amounts to 21.5% of all usernames. Examples include: *Alexandr777*, *Alexandra*, *Anatolij*, *AnastasiaNew*, *andrei777*, *Анастасия* [anastasia], *Анна* [anna], *Валерия* [valeria], *варвара* [varvara], *Дмитрий007* [dmitrii], *Dmitry*, *Екатерина* [iekaterina], *Евгения* [ievgenia], *Катерина, любовь* [liubov'], *людмила* [liudmila], *~MAGDALINA~*, [katerina], *мария* [maria], *НАДЕЖДА* [nadezhda], *Олександр* [oleksander], *Svetlana*, *Татьяна* [tatiana].

In general, an official form of a given name does not seem to encourage familiarity or intimacy, but conveys a formal or socially distant attitude. However, considering the classification proposed by Krongauz, we can note several names that do not take neutral shortened forms, e.g. *andrei777*, *Диана* [diana], *Илона* [ilona], *Луиза* [luiza], *Margo2009*, *МАРИНА* [marina], *Мауа, павел* [pavel] and *Сара* [sara], in which case the full variants play the roles of both official and neutral unofficial forms. Also, there are a number of foreign-sounding usernames, e.g. *Anny26*, *bruno*, *camilla*,

⁷⁶ Names that obviously refer to renowned persons or characters, such as *AnnaKarenina*, *Audrey Tautou* or *Tarantino*, have been excluded.

HELEN, *Melissa*, *Natali88*, *Stefany*, *Willa*, *Марко* [marko], *Фиби* [fibi], *Эттель* [etel'] and *Эшли* [eshli]. Some of them might bring to mind westernised forms of Russian names, e.g. *Anny26* might be derived from name Анна (Anna), *Natali88* from Наталья (Natalia) and *HELEN* from Елена (Elena). Some usernames look like transcriptions of foreign names, e.g. *Stefany* 'Stephanie', *Фиби* [fibi] 'Phoebe', *Эттель* [etel'] 'Ethel' and *Эшли* [eshli] 'Ashley'. Some users may associate these names with certain public figures. For example, *ricARDO* may bring to mind a footballer while *Мелани* 'Melanie' may recall a pop singer. Tsepkova (2012: 105) refers to this phenomenon as 'etymologization of a proper name'. She has observed that non-descriptive nicknames might be created by etymologisation of proper names, as in the nickname *Casper* derived from the surname *Ghost*.

Amongst these usernames, although derived from customary names, a number have been individualised by additional elements, for example *~MAGDALINA~*, *AnastasiaNew*, *Дмитрий007*, *Anny26*, *Natali88*, *В!А!Л!Е!П!И!Я=)* [valeria] and *Ростислав 282* [rostislav]. Some of these elements may be read in terms of semantic contribution, e.g. *Дмитрий007* as a reference to James Bond's cryptonym while *Anny26* suggests age. Others might be seen as enhancing the expressive or aesthetic value of usernames, e.g. *В!А!Л!Е!П!И!Я=)* and *~MAGDALINA~*⁷⁷.

Another frequent form of usernames in *Posidelki* is informal derivations of given names, including shortened names and various forms of diminutives (39.5% of usernames derived from conventional names and 18.7% of all usernames).

Russian speakers can choose from a wide range of informal expressive forms of names. For example, from the name Мария (Maria) a large number of forms can be derived, including: *Маруся* [marusia], *Марусенька* [marusien'ka], *Маруська* [marus'ka], *Марийка* [mariika], *Маша* [masha], *Машенька* [mashen'ka], *Машечка* [mashechka], *Машка* [mashka], *Маня* [mania], *Манечка* [manechka], *Манька* [an'ka], *Муся* [musia], *Мусенька* [musien'ka], *Мусечка* [musiechka], *Муська* [mus'ka], *Мура* [mura] and *Мурочка* [murochka] (Bratus, 1969: 49).

⁷⁷ Typography will be discussed in Chapter 5.6.

The following attempt of a translator of Russian literature into English to transfer expressive and emotional nuances carried by various diminutive forms of names in the works of Turgenev may illustrate their expressive potential in various contexts (Paimen, 1965: 8):

Even if you establish that, say, 'Mitia' (Митя) is a usual short form of 'Dmitrii' (Дмитрий), how to let the foreign reader sense that 'Miten'ka' (Митенька) sounds more familiar, 'Mitiukha' (Митюха) – somewhat derogatory and 'Mitiusha' (Митюша) rather warmly, while 'Mitiushen'ka' (Митюшенька) simply melts on the tongue. (...) In my translation I have kept diminutives only where they are used not affectionately, but just customarily. This way 'Katia' (Катя) has remained as 'Katia', 'Fenechka' (Фенечка) – as 'Fenechka' (Фенечка), however 'Arkasha' (Аркаша) in the mouth of Nikolai Petrovich became 'Arkady, my dear boy', while 'Eniusha' (Енюша) in the motherly hail of Arina Vasilievna – 'Yevgeny, my little one', and 'Eniushen'ka' (Енюшенька) – 'my little Yevgeny love'.

We can thus say that choosing a specific form of a name as a preferred form to address someone may be read, in reference to the common understanding of the potential qualities carried by this form, as encouraging a certain attitude towards the named, and suggesting certain types of relationships with prospective interlocutors. However, the actual effect of the choice remains open to negotiation in interaction.

In *Posidelki* we can observe the following types of unofficial forms of given names:

- Shortened names, such as: *dasha*, *jana1511*, *Masha*, *wanja*, *WoW@*, *Stam*, *Влад* [vlad], *катя* [katia], *ксюш@* [ksiusha], *Лена* [lena], *миша* [misha], *Настя* [nastia], *саша* [sasha], *Яна111* [iana]

Shortened names will probably encourage informal interaction with no particular emotional attitude. Some of them look foreign or westernised and may contain additional elements and alterations: *alex25*, *Alex777555*, *~Jess~*, *kim*, *Ok\$y*, *эд* [ed].

- Diminutive forms, for example *Вкуся*, *Дуняша*, *ирюша*, *Кисюша*, *LenOk1983*, *Lotik*, *Marysha*, *Marysja*, *Маруся*, *Svetik09*, *Танюша*, *K@tik*

Diminutive forms may suggest enhanced familiarity and warmer attitudes. Some of them have a more affectionate tone, such as *Даночка*, *Алиночка* [alinochka], *Никитосик* [nikitosik], *Олесенька* [olesen'ka], *Рикулька* [rikul'ka], *Санечка*

[sanechka], *сашулька* [sashul'ka], *T@ТоАка* [tatochka], *Эммочка* [emmochka], *Юленька* [iulen'ka] and *Юлечка* [iulechka], and may suggest an increased level of intimacy or friendliness. According to Krongauz (2004: 172), when the relationship gets closer and more emotional using some variants of diminutives is virtually unavoidable. As usernames, these forms of names may thus suggest a preference for a friendly and warm relationship.

Moreover, Sidorova (2006: 101) suggests that affectionate usernames do not reflect the attitude towards the self, but are selected to stimulate consideration from other participants. These usernames seem to be saying: 'I am a little vulnerable being, I am like a child – please, do not hurt me'. They might remind others of endearing terms, such as *sweetheart*, *darling* and *honey*; however, names will emphasise individuality. Again, some diminutive names look foreign: *Andi*, *Jenny*, *Jessi*, *Katty*, *Little_Gabi**

- Derogatory forms, for example *Алешка* [alioshka], *анькаЗ* [an'ka], *Дашка* [dashka], *Климка* [klimka], *ксюшка* [ksiushka], *Ленка* [lenka], *mashka* [mashka], *олька* [ol'ka], *Яська* [ias'ka], *ТАНЮХА* [taniukha]

These usernames can perhaps be compared to familiarising terms such as *pal*, *buddy*, *dude* or *mate*, which in general reinforce solidarity and equality, or, as Kiesling (2004: 282) describes it, 'friendly nonintimacy' or 'cool solidarity'. However, unlike familiarisers, which can be used to address strangers, e.g. to reduce social distance, using the name highlights individuality. They might also be associated with nicknames that indicate familiarity, as well as the status of the group insider. They are often used within the same age group and by young people, and might carry a hint of friendliness or hostility (Griffin, 2010: 376).

15.2% of usernames referring to conventional names (7.2% of all usernames) have been derived from other forms of personal names or personal names in combination with other components.

A group of participants used a given name and a surname: *John Warner*, *ludakaplata*, *klichevmarat*, *ShumIrina*, *VorobievMihail*, *Мэри Лу* [meri li], *нина калмыкова* [nina kalmukova], *Лола Дорозеева* [lola dorofeeva]. Surnames (as well

as patronymics) categorise individuals as family members (while single names make the group identity irrelevant) (Finch, 2008).

Surnames, the newest element of Russian personal names, were introduced specifically for official purposes⁷⁸, and basically have remained limited to this sphere in their standard use⁷⁹. Typically, they are used in formal, especially written communication (Superanskaia and Suslova, 1981: 165-166; Poliakova, 1975: 151). As a form of address in everyday communication this is the least used – both by itself and in combination (Krongauz, 2004: 172). However, a first name in combination with a surname seems a standard form to refer to people in media and thus might be seen as a neutral form of presentation in public, to a wide, unknown audience. Combined with an informal form of a given name, they may seem less official (e.g. *Лола Дорофеева*). In English-speaking societies it is a common form of presentation name even amongst top politicians, e.g. Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Tony Blair (Callary, 2008: 197), while in Russian it seems more typical for show business, e.g. *Маша Распутина* [masha rasputina] or *Митя Фомин* [mitia fomin].

The reversed order of given name and surname (*VorobievMihail, klichevmarat*) enhances the formal overtones of the username as this form is generally restricted to official writing, such as documents or alphabetical lists. Foreign-sounding names like *John Warner, KatarinaShlein* and *(*_TrinA TyleR_*)* seem to be pseudonymous usernames; perhaps they refer to some specific figures recognisable to the ‘insiders’. Full names may be used as markers of authenticity and reliability (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003). Thus, in general, usernames in the form of first names combined with surnames may be received as taking a formal position with a reserved attitude towards the audience, while using informal form of a given name may be seen as neutralising, to some extent, the distancing effect.

⁷⁸ To facilitate practices of succession; in Russia they first (in 16th century) became obligatory for the aristocracy (Nikonov, 1974: 179–186).

⁷⁹ They might be used in informal language, especially to designate families, e.g. *АКИМОВЫ, ДОРОХИНЫ* (Superanskaia and Suslova, 1981: 165-166).

Some users selected usernames that look like given names and initials: *danara* (Dana R. A.), *Dianara* (Diana R. A.), *EvgeniyaS*, *GalinaAM*, *lyudmilad* (Lyudmila D.), *milata* (Mila T. A.), *Rimma T*, *Аврора_M*, *ТатьянаБ* (Tatiana B.), *ЮлияК* (Yulia K.). Given names combined with initials look more distant than a single given name, and may be associated with written rather than spoken communication. Surnames combined with initials: *gerasimovami* (Gerasimova M. I.), *kuzminalu* (Kuzmina L. U.) refer to official, written communication. Some of these usernames are ambiguous. For example, *innaia* may be read as a transcription of Инна Я. [inna ia], a name and an initial, but ‘я’ [ia] is also a 1st person singular pronoun, thus the username may also read as ‘Inna me’. Similarly, *Аная* [ana ia], might be ‘Ана Я’, a name and initial, or ‘Ана me’. Username *Шалена* [shalena] might be derived from Ukrainian *шалена* ‘crazy’, but could also be read as Ш. Алена (Sh. Alena), i.e. an initial and a name. *Лурусичка* [lurusichka] might be read as Л. У. Русичка ‘L. U. Rusichka’ – initials and a diminutive form from Руся [rusia], a short form of names Руслан [ruslan] (m) and Руслана [ruslana] (f) (Petrovskii, 1995: 191) – but this explanation is rather speculative.

Another type of derivation from personal names, as in *annadro* and *mariasam*, possibly indicates a name and a first syllable of a surname or patronymic; such forms are not typically used in offline communication. The additional element may have been used to differentiate the username from others derived from the same name.

A couple of usernames are redolent of single surnames: *KuznetsoFF*, *Sladuskin*, *Suvorov*, *valerman*, *Сиделкин* [sidelkin]. The use of surnames alone seems to suggest social distance, but without overtones of respect towards the addressee: when interaction involves a superior and a subordinate, the superior may address the subordinate by a surname but not the other way round (Gladrow, 2008: 41). However, in *Posidelki* these usernames are not purely or clearly surnames. *KuznetsoFF* may look casual or humorous due to playing with spelling and letter case. *Suvorov* may be subject to etymologisation by association with General Aleksandr Vasil’evich Suvorov, while *valerman* may bring to mind the contraction of *Valerin man* ‘Valeria’s man’. *Sladuskin* and *Сиделкин* evoke literary characterising names, styled as surnames by the suffix -in, derived from *сладкий*

[sladkii] ‘sweet’ and from *сидеть* [sidet’] ‘to sit’ respectively, which will not generate an attitude of distance.

The usernames *sergeevich19* and *ТЁмыЧ* (probably a shortened patronymic from the name Артём) might be patronymics. While surnames usually link individuals with a group of relatives, patronymics indicate affiliations with one specific person – a father. In general, using a patronymic can be treated as a marker of distance, deference or age asymmetry in both official and informal communication⁸⁰. However, used by itself, it indicates familiarity, as in ‘Никитич, иди сюда!’ (Nikitich, come here!) (Sal’mon, 2002: 41), and shortened patronymics in particular are only used in informal communication. Thus, these usernames produce an impression of familiarity without deference or affection. Remarkably, in *Posidelki* there is no username in the form of a first name in combination with a patronymic, which in everyday communication is a common form of address between adults.

The usernames *Танюшкин* [taniushkin] and *надин* [nadin] enable various readings. They refer to the female names Танюшка [taniushka] and Надя [nadia] respectively. They may indicate ‘belonging to Танюшка/ Надя’, or might be informal derivations from these names; *надин* may also bring to mind the foreign name Nadine. They may also be surnames that originated from metronyms derived from these names.⁸¹

Some participants in *Posidelki* have combined names with other terms that place them in the social context by indicating their role, status or kin position, and thus may also construct relational categories. Terms of address other than names are said to fix the character of a relationship, make it nonnegotiable, fix asymmetries and make the parties keep to the standards by ensuring a controlled response (Alford, 1987: 100-101, 109-113). The usernames *LariSKA gitaristka* ‘Lariska the guitarist’,

⁸⁰ In casual communication a combination ‘name plus patronymic’ also functions, and might be used in shortened form, e.g. Пал Палыч [pal palych] instead of Павел Павлович [pavel pavlovich] (Sal’mon, 2002: 42).

⁸¹ Using metronyms instead of patronyms was rare, but did happen occasionally; for example, Tupikov (1903: 23-24) cites a number of records (e.g. *Васко Варваринь* [vasko varvarin], *Данилко Катюшинь* [danilko katiushin]). However, the surname *Надин* might also come from the old masculine name Надей [nadei]/ Надежа [nadezha] (Tupikov, 1903: 265)

Santalara, and *Царица Ирина* [tsaritsa irina] ‘Empress Irene’ can perhaps be compared to occupational and role titles, such as *doctor*, *judge*, *president* and *officer*. They categorise and authenticate the person as a member of the given group that holds specific qualifications, skills and competencies, as well as trigger specific concepts of the so categorised persons. Using a name along with it adds more individuality, and in the case of a familiar form, a more casual character. Thus, we could say that selecting such usernames is a strategy to claim the status of an ‘expert’.⁸² *Mère Susie* ‘Mother Susie’ and *Лилия мама* [lilia mama] combine given names with kin terms; in Russian kin terms are typically used for generations older than the speaker. Kin terms tend to be used to address superiors in relationships that require a constant reminder and maintenance of authority (Alford, 1987: 102-103). They may also refer to fictive kinship terms used to address strangers. In Russian, it is not inappropriate to use kinship terms to address unrelated people: *сынoк/дoчкa* [synok/dochka] ‘son/daughter’ to address a young person, *дeдyшкa/бaбyшкa* [dedushka/babushka] ‘grandpa/grandma’ for the elderly, familiarising *бpатeц* [bratets] ‘brother, bro’ for an unknown adult male, and others. They may be said to reduce distance and express warm attitude (Krongauz, 2009: 25). Other usernames in the form of conventional names combined with characterising terms in *Posidelki* are: *Стapушкa_Бeтти* ‘grannie/old Betty’ refers to age, which is an important attitude-defining factor, but will probably more likely be interpreted as a metaphor, which also triggers certain associations. However, *стapик* [starik] /*стapушкa* [starushka] ‘old man/woman’ are also commonly used as familiarising terms of address by peers of all ages (old chap/gal). *Сергeй gold* [sergei gold], *AnastasiaNew* and *Иpочкa плюс* [irochka plus] seem to carry more personal meanings, best known to the named individuals. One participant used an honorific with a name, *Miss_Kapriz*, but it might actually refer to a number of things, e.g. a song title. Usernames in the form of an honorific alone do not belong to the discussed group of usernames strictly speaking, but honorifics constitute part of the selection of terms of reference and address that, when used alone may, in a way, be contrasted with the individualising character of

⁸² See e.g. Thornborrow, J. (2001). ‘Authenticating Talk: Building Public Identities in Audience Participation Broadcasting.’ *Discourse Studies*: 459–479.

names. In *Posidelki*, *Lady* may refer either to politeness or to status, while *Дамочка* [damochka] ‘little lady’ sounds outdated or ironic, if not sarcastic.

5.5.4. Summary

In *Posidelki*, usernames derived from conventional personal names are commonly selected as a form of address. The proportion of this kind of username in the present study (almost half of all usernames) seems to confirm the importance of names in Russian communication. The analysed data reveals a clear preference for a single given name in both formal and informal forms – almost 85% of these usernames and over 40% of all usernames in *Posidelki*. A considerable number of given names in full, official form accompanied by the near absence of patronymics seem in line with Krongauz’s observation that a single given name might be becoming a new neutral official form of address. On the other hand, a substantial number of affectionate diminutives suggest that many users may prefer to frame the relationship as based on familiarity and friendliness from the beginning. This may suggest various ideas and expectations regarding interactions and relationships with potential interlocutors. According to Formanovskaia (2003: 10), the important role of rituals of social etiquette is to integrate the circle of ‘us’ and its distinction from ‘them’. Thus, we can perhaps say that the usernames that display familiarity may suggest categorising potential interlocutors as ‘us’ and suggest preferring the relationship to start from the state of ‘integration’, while those that display distance may categorise the prospective interlocutors as ‘them’ and approach the potential interactions and relationships in reference to norms applied to encounters with strangers.

Many participants in *Posidelki* who selected standard names as their username managed to individualise them to make them personal and unique. Some have used the opportunity given by text-based CMC to manipulate the visual aspect of the name. They selected between the Cyrillic and Latin script, altered the spelling, played with the letter case and added typographical elements that are not normally used offline. Some also used foreign or westernised names. Because it looks like typographical elements may significantly affect the perception of the username, this

might need more attention. The next chapter is therefore dedicated to a more detailed analysis of typography in usernames in *Posidelki*.

5.6. Typography and identity construction

The question of how the visual aspects of written language co-constructs the meaning of the text has not typically received much attention from linguists⁸³, who in this area seem to follow the Saussurean tradition as illustrated by the statement: ‘Whether I write in black or white, in incised characters or in relief, with a pen or a chisel – none of that is of any importance for the meaning’ (de Saussure, 1983: 118). Whether analysing the language of media or everyday communication, the focus has been on its content and structure.

Meanwhile, CMC analysts definitely cannot ignore the visual aspect of the communication. CMC has made us see the communication. The text with accompanying gestures, facial expressions, emotions, voice tones, actions, and even the participants themselves – all has been converted into the graphic symbols that are integral part of conversation and cannot be omitted by the researcher. Letters and punctuation marks become building blocks to construct faces, as in c);o) (winking face with a hat); body parts, as in (@) (@) (breasts), / /u\ \ (penis between legs); and other objects, as in c(_) (a cup), @ } } ~ ~ ~ (a rose); gestures, as in *Racexgundam*: (((((((((((((DARLA))))))))))))) (*Racexgundam* hugs *DARLA*) (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008: 258-260); and actions: :-Q :| :| :\sssss :) (‘I put a joint into my mouth; I inhale twice, exhale, let the smoke out, and then experience pleasure’) (Danet et al., 1997). On the other hand, non-linguistic symbols often represent letters, parts of words and words: *Ren@t@*, *@si@*, *Tosi@*, *Ca\$hman*, *Un4GIVEN* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 89-93), 4 (for), 10q (thank you), B4 (before).

This kind of visual expression is not without precedence. Experimentation with the communicative potential of the visual form of written text has also been a part of avant-garde literary movements. Russian authors, especially Futurists, experimented

⁸³ At least in Europe – probably in other cultures, such as Japan, where the visual aspect of language and tradition of calligraphy are important, the attitude might be different.

with visual aspects of language. Andrei Bely may be considered a pioneering figure in typographical experimentations with his attention to layout composition in both poem and prose. Aleksei Kruchonykh is recognised for his manuscript books (in collaboration with Khlebnikov): the books were handwritten by the authors who viewed hand-written text as an image rather than text. Vasili Kamensky produced unique ‘ferro-concrete’ poems; he used the printed page as canvas to produce pictures made of words. Many other authors, such as Ilya Zdanevich, were also known for their innovative typography. Finally, the most well known is Vladimir Mayakovsky for his recognised and still widely imitated verse construction known as ‘stepladder’ (Janecek, 1984; Kempton, n.d.: 19). Some experiments with typography are surprisingly reminiscent of what we can find online. For example, Kamensky’s poems, such as *Цыганка* ‘Gypsy Woman’, *ВЫЗОВ* ‘Summons’ and *ТАНГО с коровами* ‘Tango with Cows’ make a creative use of italics, lettercases, fonts and font sizes, while *Телефон* ‘Telephone’ includes digits (Janecek, 1998: 157-162).

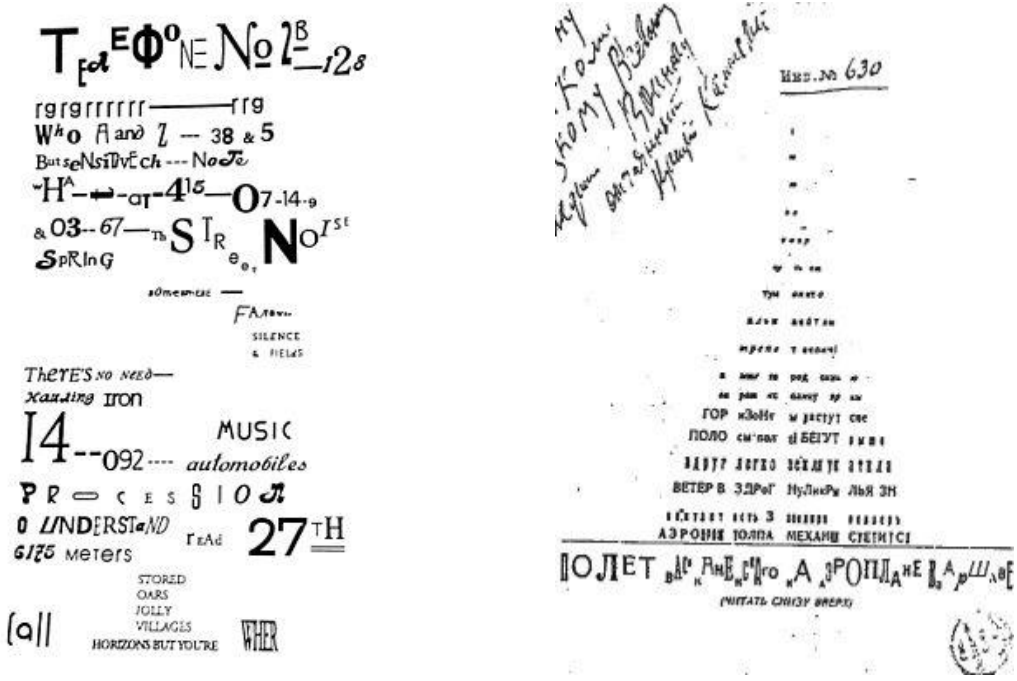


Image 1. ‘Telephone’ and ‘Vasya Kamensky’s Airplane Flight in Warsaw’

This trend has found its continuation in works of contemporary Russian visual poets, such as Elizaveta Mnatsakanova (Sandler, 2008), as well as Rea Nikonova and Sergej Sigej (Nazarenko, 2006), who are part of the Neo-Futurists (Janecek, 1998).

Drucker (1984), on the other hand, describes experiences from her individual projects that also involved typographic experimentation. Drucker, while working on a letterpress, ran out of certain letters and she ended up improvising. This can be compared to the experience of CMC users who also actively look for a way to substitute for the missing cues. To substitute for the missing letters, she played with the phonetic or visual resemblance of graphic elements such as in ‘pUBL!C’, ‘eggsp(er)ience’ or ‘1ND1V1DUAL’, puns and double meanings, such as when letters of the alphabet are located in a word that sounds out the letter’s name: ‘B gins’, ‘Pro C dure’, ‘D sire’, etc. (Drucker 1984: 9-16). She has observed several effects of her play on the connections between spoken and written language, which, according to her, emphasised the distinctions between the two forms of language. The deviations ‘call attention to the structure of those norms, as much as (...) subvert them (...)’. ‘The substitution or elimination of letters or other visual elements can alter the conventional use and meaning of words (...) as if revealing associative possibilities in the word itself’ and gives the ‘possibility of structuring more than one value or meaning (*plurivalence*) into the language – on the level of the word, the sentence and the page’. She has also noticed that various elements had various potential for affecting the perception; for example, missing consonants caused greater distortion than missing vowels, which could easily be represented by dashes, commas and periods (Drucker, 1984: 8-13). We can thus see graphic symbols as pieces of material to construct the meaning of the text, as

elements in their own right [that] are capable of carrying discrete and simultaneous messages. Despite their ‘ordinary’ purpose, which is to compose the very words that generally overwhelm or negate their individual presence, letters possess a V!V!D ability to create (Drucker, 1984: 13-14).

The expressive potential of the visual aspect of language has also been made use of in publishing, through the art of calligraphy and typography. The expertise of typography as a discipline can help us understand ‘the relationships between texture, social practices and discursive practices’ by offering ‘conventions against which we can chart the non-conventional and non-expert typographies’ (Candlin, 2001: xvii-xviii). Crystal’s (1998: 7) view of the written language that it takes both the linguist

and the typographer to ‘provide a complete description of its forms and structures and a satisfactory explanation of its functions and effects’ certainly applies to CMC.

5.6.1. Tradition of typography

To define a non-standard use, it needs to be established what a standard use is. The establishment of the standards themselves was a long and complex process embedded in various aspects of the social context. In Russia, for example, when print was introduced, for quite a long time it functioned along with manuscript production of written text, which influenced each other. In a non-religious sphere, no clear visual correspondence developed between print and handwriting, while in religious writings, as Franklin (2011: 538) explains, ‘manuscript and print maintained a visual and functional equivalence, as different means of doing the same thing, right through to the 19th century’ – sometimes to the extent that it was hard ‘at an unpracticed glance, to distinguish which book is a product of which technology’. This may have been because there existed a common idea about what religious publication should look like. For example, the first attempts at distribution of biblical writings in the civic type in the 1820s were discontinued as the writings ‘did not look like the authoritative Scriptures ought to look’ (Franklin, 2011: 539-540).

In Russia, the early manifestation of standardisation was introduction of obligatory universal, single-format, centrally printed passports for internal travel across administrative boundaries in the mid-18th century (Franklin, 2010: 235). After the October Revolution, standardisation and state control over design and production of the models of fonts (expressed first of all in limiting the foreign influences) was an element of ‘cultural revolution’ and ‘new times’ (Shitsgal, 1959: 235-247).

Throughout the history of typography, the design has depended on various factors. It may depend on the local trends, such as in times when there were two typographic centres in Russia, in Moscow and in Saint Petersburg that devised different typographic designs. The character of communication matters, too: different fonts have been used for official and professional publications than, for example, for poetry, but also the same content may have been presented differently depending on the purpose and audience, e.g. literature published in pocket form required compact

graphics, significantly different than for example collectable or gift editions. Different requirements applied to newspapers that had to make a large amount of text readable given limited space. Also, every epoch followed some fashions in font design. For instance, in the 18th century the fonts were influenced by the style of classicism, austere in construction. At the beginning of 20th century all traditional rules of correct typography were rejected; the modern style was characterised by wide variety of fonts, including various stylisations: gothic, Old-Church-Slavonic, imitations of handwritten calligraphy, and many others, often heavily decorated and therefore inconvenient to read. Finally, individual traits of specific engravers also mattered, some of whom gained recognition for their individual style and mastery (Shitsgal, 1959: 117-118, 126, 133-136, 139, 149, 179-191, 198, 200-201, 220-221). Also, some forms of professional publishing are more creative and flexible visually than others, such as comic books that tend to contain representations of phonological forms ‘that we might have thought unrepresentable’ (Candlin, 2001: xvi).

There are various aspects of typography that can be used as communicatively meaningful tools⁸⁴: typeface, thickness, size, case, positioning of characters, word separation and letter spacing, legibility, length of lines, differentiation and distinction of words (Candlin, 2001: xvi; Walker, 2001: 20-25). Generally speaking, we can recognise two areas of application of typography and typographic analysis: **micro and macro typography**, the former referring to arrangement and design of the letters in the line, while the latter refers to arrangement of the text on the page (Spitzmüller, 2007: 4). In professional typography, the graphic aspects of communication typically serve the following main objectives (Turnbull and Baird, 1968: 275):

- To attract attention
- To make the text legible and comprehensible

⁸⁴ How applying a variation to the visual representation of the text can affect its meaning, may be demonstrated by the use of italics (Crystal, 1998: 13-14):

- I have been reading about America in the paper. (i.e., the country)
- I have been reading about *America* in the paper. (i.e., the book by Alastair Cook)

- To make a certain impression

Typography, just like any other aspect of language-in-use, can serve as a means of differentiation and categorisation. It may serve to indicate socio-cultural distinctions by marking standard and non-standard language users. For example, trademarks using non-standard or non-transparent typography, such as those stylised as calligraphic brushstrokes of Asian or Arabic writing, can be read as visual representations of stereotypical images of specific groups, marking social, racial and ethnic otherness. A number of fonts from the early 1900s, such as Chinese Wong, Samoa and Jim Crow, as well as contemporary ones, such as House Industries' collection 'Bad Neighborhood', including for example Poorhouse, Condemndhouse, and Crackhouse, have been specifically designed to stereotypically represent various categories of 'others' (Salen, 2001: 134-142).

Crystal (1998: 11-12), on the other hand, compares typography to voice. First, it is possible to recognise an individual by voice alone. Also, certain social functions might be performed by adopting a characteristic form of vocal expression, such as the harsh tones of the drill sergeant. Similarly, we can recognise someone by their handwriting and many groups or products by their characteristic typography, e.g. newspapers, brands and subcultures. In other words, typography has a 'potential to refer to a specific value system and thus can be used to express values, attitudes, associations, etc' (Spitzmüller, 2007: 4).

5.6.2. Non-expert typography

Typography is employed not just by experts in professional publishing but also by ordinary language users in everyday written communication: letters, notes, shopping lists, memos, e-mails and other things. Non-expert use of typography is largely intuitive and based on the common perceptions of the role of typographical modifications. As Walker (2001: 29) observes:

Professional designers have ways of measuring these things, lay people have to rely of using a kind of articulation that they think will make sense to their target audience. Lay designers producing documents for other lay designers tend to be working (...) along the lines of 'If something is important it should be bigger, in capitals, and if it's really important it should be underlined as

well'. This kind of articulation is not based on any kind of formal prescription, but associative, generally-accepted principles.

In addition, more than one graphic design may represent the same function, e.g. capitalising, underlining, colour, size and emboldening might all be used to draw attention to certain pieces of text (Walker, 2001:72-74). Language users are consciously or unconsciously aware of the graphics of the language; we learn the graphic conventions from handwritten, printed, telecast and digital words we are exposed to daily. Some general prescriptions of visual organisation in a particular writing system may be taught at school. If we need to, we can find guidance in typing and style manuals. The visual organisation of non-expert texts may also depend on conventions, often not explicitly formulated, applied to specific genres and with local references (that might be illegible to 'outsiders'). This may vary from country to country and depend on the script (non-Latin and non-alphabetic scripts may require different consideration to ensure the legibility of the text), and on many other factors. But in general, the design is often supposed to help to 'get the message across' (Walker, 2001: xii, 15, 31-32, 39, 51-53, 66-68). There are, however, some general factors that influence the visual organisation of text (Walker, 2001: 12-28):

- the technology used – determines available characters and spatial flexibility
- formality/informality of text – the more formal text, the less space for creativity
- acceptability within a particular genre
- the intended audience

For example, an important aspect for lay people is the perceived level of formality. In terms of rules and prescriptions, the more formal the communication, the more likely it is that the prescriptions will be followed. In terms of the visual aspect, formal communication might be assumed to be square in proportion, upright and with consistency between repeated letters. Informal genres are more likely to be compressed and slanted, and may contain joined letters or ligatures, as well as script types associated with informality. The choice of formal or informal lettering style used by lay designers is often influenced by preconceptions based on precedent, observation and training (Walker, 2001: 41-46). Particularly creative is informal

communication of children and adolescents, containing a variety of graphic forms of expression: capitals and large letters to ‘shout’, shaky letters that speak in a ghostly voice, tiny letters to represent a very small voice, multiple punctuation marks to denote emotions, single, double or triple underlining to indicate a scale of emphasis, encircling of words with zig-zags and stars, non-standard spelling such as ‘allwayz’, ‘thanx’, and contractions such as ‘gonna’ and ‘gotta’ (Walker, 2001: 55-56).

Typographical variation in non-expert text may inform us about linguistic practices among individuals and social groups, including ‘issues of authority and power, of membership and collegiality, of informality and formality, and (...) of distinct orders of discourse in the community’ (Candlin, 2001: xvii-xviii). In order to do so, we have to identify those typographic features in the written text that are communicatively meaningful.

5.6.3. Typography in CMC

CMC constitutes one of the forms of lay typographic design, and the use of typography in informal CMC has a lot in common with traditional informal writing, e.g. in its attempts to compensate for verbal cues, such as multiple punctuation to indicate emotions, capitalisation for emphasis and abbreviations to speed up writing (Danet and Herring, 2007b: 12-13; Tseliga, 2007: 121; Danet, 2001). On the other hand, some elements, such as emoticons, are unique to CMC.

Technically, CMC offers a wide selection of typographic tools: multiple typefaces, type sizes, font and background colours, images and other things, but typographical conventions of particular websites as well as skills of particular individuals may limit the choice. The possibility to present the result to a theoretically unlimited audience at little cost makes CMC an ‘excellent playground for typographical communication’ (Spitzmüller, 2007: 7).

Typographic playfulness has been observed globally and reveals both similarities and differences between the languages (Danet and Herring, 2007a: 561; Danet and Herring, 2007b: 12-13). Some typographic features of CMC may constitute sociolinguistic variables with a potential for understanding social and cultural

diversity, a good example being multilingual and multi-graphological societies (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Candlin, 2001: xvi).

Individual users are also assessed by the way they use typography, but it is socially and culturally dependent, too. For example, in English usage of ‘smileys’ is often considered a ‘telltale sign’ that one is a newcomer (‘newbie’) and they are not appreciated in serious communication. In contrast, in Japanese CMC ‘kaomoji’ (Japanese-style smileys) are much more popular and even experienced communicators use them (Danet and Herring, 2007a: 563). Typographic conventions may also change over time. Smileys, created and circulated in the early 1980s by Scott Fahlman and others in the computer science community at Carnegie Mellon University, were originally a ‘male’ phenomenon while nowadays they are typically associated with females and young people (Danet and Herring, 2007a: 563).

5.6.4. Typography in usernames

In general, the following factors are likely to affect the visual form of usernames:

- The technology

Usernames differ from other personal names in that they are typically first seen, not pronounced, which makes them visual as much as linguistic means of communication; this gives a greater opportunity to use typography as a tool of identity performance, not typically in use in standard naming practices. As the primary function of usernames is to enable a person to enter some part of Internet space, technically, how they sound is not that important; in fact, any sequence of symbols, whether difficult or impossible to pronounce, is a valid entrance code. The constraints related to the visual form of usernames depend on typographic resources as well as limitations on specific websites.

- Formality/informality

In the formal CMC, less space might be left for creativity in usernames that are often imposed by institutions, while in informal CMC, where users are normally free to select their usernames, they might be more varied and creative.

- Acceptability within a particular environment

In general, the visual aspect of usernames depends on official regulations and customary practices on specific web sites.

- The intended audience

Usernames might be selected with a specific type of audience in mind. Some may draw on the common intuitions about the usage of typography, such as all caps to attract attention, while others might refer to typographic customs of specific group.

There have been some attempts at assessing the communicative role of typographic experimentation in usernames. Van Langendonck (2007: 301-302), based on Flemish material, suggests that visual effects are used to increase the aesthetic value and attractiveness of a username. Such formations as: *HaloStaR*, *Second|Sun*, *D@rkst@r[Tr]*, *^{-}^-^*, *phRe4k*, *DaStUrBeD*, *jaklien* and *tinkeltie* are created to look and/or sound interesting and attract the attention of prospective interlocutors.

Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003: 89-90) cites numerous examples from Polish portals, such as non-standard usage of letter case: *niNA*, *arteK*, *MiReK*; numbers: *An25na*, *a37dam*; elongation and repetition: *Paaameelkkka*, *MAGDAAA*, *Ola_Ola*, *ja_ja_cek*; writing several words in one sequence: *fantazjatoja* (fantazja to ja – ‘fantasy is me’), *jawiemjak* (ja wiem jak – ‘I know how’); omission of diacritical marks: *Agnieszka Pinczow* (Pińczów), *polglowki* (półgłówki) and replacing ‘a’ with the ‘@’ symbol: *Ren@t@*, *@si@*. Quite surprisingly, Naruszewicz-Duchlińska (2003: 89-90) seems to share the Saussurian opinion on the role of typography: according to her, these manoeuvres serve in most cases as stylisation and do not interfere with the semantics of the usernames, and only occasionally contribute to the meaning, such as in *!!!KONKRETNY27 wrocław*. As she explains, the exclamation marks in front of the phrase draw attention to the characteristics of the named (‘specific, defined, straight-minded’) rather than his age or location.

Scheidt (2001: 19-20) has observed a tendency for extensive usage of typographic innovations amongst English-speaking teenagers, such as in **~DeNeLLe~**, *....DiScOmBoBuLaTeD....* and *~\$~Prin(c)ess of the Night~\$~*, which, as she

reckons, serves to style the usernames and demonstrate originality. Zvereva (2012: 106) has reported a similar tendency in Russian teenagers, in both the names of the users and their blogs, e.g. ~!!!Бло}I{ег ПсЫ}{он@до4кИ!!!~ (Бложик психопаточки [blozhik psikhopatochki] ‘a little blog of a little psychopath’) or %~SSСкромниЦЦааа~% (Скромница [skromnitsa] ‘the modest one’). The users applied a variety of alterations in each name: graphic elements such as }I{ instead of Ж, }} instead of Х, 4 instead of ч, @ instead of а, and elements of padonkian spelling such as the suffix -ег [-eg] instead of -ик [-ik], as well as mixing lower and upper cases, and the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets.

Finally, certain forms of usernames may be interactive, e.g. able to transform to express the emotional state of the named, such as in Bechar-Israeli’s (1995) example:

When I chose a nick for myself, I looked for a name that would relate to this virtual world in which no sounds are heard, and I created a name which cannot be pronounced. The name I chose looks like a face, and consists of the following three typographic symbols: ^_^ . In this way, I can express my feelings visually, and don't have to depend on words. For example, *^_^* for when I blush or feel embarrassed, @^_^@ when I don't want to hear (as though wearing earphones), !^_^! or o^_^o when I feel festive. When I am tired and half asleep I will write ~_~, and when I'm even more tired and can barely keep my eyes open I look like this: -_- . My nickname elicits many and various responses, and several people asked me how to pronounce it. I was particularly impressed with a reaction by a person nicknamed *tsam*; she fondly calls me ^_^'le (in Hebrew ‘le’ is added to the end of a name as a diminutive and a sign of affection).

To recognise communicatively meaningful typographic elements in usernames we can apply the concept of value-added text (VAT). VAT, in short, is an attempt to visually extend the semantic potential of a text in a computer-based environment, for example, trying to replace some paralinguistic features such as body language, expression, gesture, intonation, volume, etc. The VAT features are recognised and understood intuitively without a conscious learning process, for example by exposure over time. ‘It is not, therefore, necessary to concentrate on learning VAT but merely to experience it and let its meaning accrue’ (Mealing, 2003: 57). This approach takes

on the participant's perspective and can be considered in line with the general theoretical frame of ethnomethodological study.

Username may count as VAT due to modifications made to them that will potentially affect their perception. We should note that not all kinds of non-standard typography will count as VAT; for example, typing in all lowercase, although in general it is a non-standard behaviour, is rather common in CMC and is not perceived as meaningful by the average user. On the contrary, using all caps is recognised as deliberate modification and counts as a raised voice.

5.6.5. Typography in usernames in *Posidelki*

5.6.5.A. Elements of macro-typography

Although in the case of usernames the most noticeable are variations related to micro-typography (at the level of letter design, such as spelling and non-standard symbols), there are some potentially meaningful features that might be considered macro-typographic, i.e. related to arrangement of the text – namely, the length of usernames and arrangements of their components.

The length of usernames is typically limited; however, the number of allowed characters varies from site to site and may take various forms from single characters to sentences. The policies of name creation might significantly affect the form of the name. Where the number of characters is severely restricted, users might apply 'shortening' strategies such as abbreviating or merging words, e.g. *whathell* (what the hell) (Bechar-Israeli, 1995) and *BlueAdept* (Danet et al., 1997) found on IRC, where usernames may contain up to nine characters. Danet et al. (1997) explain how these strategies work and what role they play:

<BlueAdept> (...) plays with typographic conventions, eliding two words which are normally written a space apart, and capitalizing them where normally they would not be capitalized. A nick on IRC may have up to nine characters; thus eliding 'Blue' and 'Adept' allows this person to have both words in his nick.

Elsewhere, usernames might be long, descriptive and decorated, such as: *Fajny facet szuka kobiety* 'Nice bloke looking for a woman', *Sextelefon dla ostrych lasek* 'Sex-

phone for hot chicks' (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 92); **I walk with a lieemp cuz i'm da greatest Pieemp**, *Snowboarder Boy Creator of the Hard Core Snowboarders*, *^In the End it Doesn't Even Matter^* (Scheidt, 2001: 18–20).

The majority of usernames in *Posidelki* consist of one or two elements, e.g. *Anatolij*, *faruh*, *Санечка*, *саша*, *John Warner*, *Ирочка плюс*, and occasionally three, e.g. *Happy Free Bird*. In *Posidelki*, there are no officially stated restrictions as for the length of usernames, but the founder of the forum, who is also the main administrator, has stated on a number of occasions that long usernames are not in the style of the forum. In the case of *Posidelki* the length of usernames serves thus as one of the expressions of the forum's style.

Components of usernames can be arranged in various ways. In *Posidelki*, some usernames have the ' _ ' sign inserted between the elements of the name, such as in: *Одинокая_звезда*, *Theodora_Theodora*, *Старушка_Бетти*, *Лола_Дорофеева*, *alaya_malva*, *Alpha_Dog*, *Аэропа_М* and *Miss_Kapriz*. Typically, space cannot be used in the email addresses, and is commonly replaced by the ' _ ' sign, which might explain the widespread habit of doing the same in other usernames. Although it affects the visual arrangement of the username, it is unlikely to be perceived as VAT.

Several usernames are in the form of two or three components merged together: *ЭржюльПуаро*, *ЧеловекБезИмени*, *СанчоПансо*, *ПсихованнаяЁлка*, *VorobievMihail*, *GoshaFaust*, *KatarinaShlein*, *MyDoom*, *NastyGirl*, *scarsopen*, *newalias*, *Dianara* (Diana R. A.), *EvgeniyaS*, *GalinaAM*, *lyudmilad* (Lyudmila D.), *Римма Т*, *ТатьянаБ*, *ЮлияК*. In some cases the components are capitalised, which makes them easier to distinguish. It may look like the shortening strategy described earlier, but in *Posidelki*, although short usernames are preferred, there is no strict limitation on the numbers of symbols, thus there is no practical need for this manoeuvre. We can speculate that again these usernames may have been transferred from e-mail addresses where a space cannot constitute a part of a username.

5.6.5.B. Micro-typographic features

Punctuation marks retain the flavour of spoken language (Mealing, 2003: 44). Exclamation marks symbolise a raised voice, which may express a number of emotions: anger, excitement, fear, etc. Multiple exclamation marks are commonly used in CMC in regular text to enhance its expressive value but not so much in usernames:

- Type back soon!!!!!! (Danet, 2001: 17)
- 読みたいですう~~~!!! (Japanese) [Yomitai desuu~~~!!!] ‘I really, really want to read it’ (Nishimura, 2007: 166-168)

One user in *Posidelki* incorporated a number of exclamation marks into her name: *B!A!J!E!P!I!Я=*). This username draws attention as an extremely ‘loud’ name – the exclamation marks enhance the effect of using all uppercase, which also indicates a raised voice. As this username also contains a smiling emoticon, in terms of VAT the raised voice in this case may be associated with expression of positive emotions.

Capitalisation, or lack thereof, in the case of proper names, is a pure convention. And, as Crystal (1998: 14) explains, such names ‘convey no semantic contrast if their capitalization is altered: london is still the same London, john smith is still the same John Smith’.

In *Posidelki* there is a considerable number of non-capitalised usernames, for example: *kalibri, semen, енот, малиновый десерт, красноярочка, filimonka, liliputka, царанка, клоп-вонючка, patras, nevasanni, easyeas, africa, ярына, янка, lulka, lungachka, mahmud, mak, maksat, manki, mashka, milata, miror, mola-mola, molod, needle, newalias, pandagirl*. Although in the standard form of language lack of capitalisation is considered abnormal, in CMC it is quite common to speed up typing (Tseliga, 2007: 127-128). Not capitalising usernames is also common and perhaps is habitual rather than meaningful.

All caps: a number of usernames in *Posidelki* have been typed with all capital letters: *DARTVENOM, MAGDALINA, АЛЪБ, SENSOR, VILKA, SMILE, SKI, AKADO,*

РЫБКА, НАДЕЖДА, МАРИНА, GIMMIEH, HELEN, REALGOD. In usernames, the all caps typing seems to be used for emphasis rather than a raised voice, similar to how a text may contain elements made to look important by emphasising them. As Walker (2001: 48-52) notes of non-expert typography: the difference in the font size between two texts intuitively makes the larger or bolder text look emphasised and more important, changing its perceived status. A similar strategy is used in CMC, where capitalisation generally indicates a raised voice, e.g. I'M REALLY ANGRY AT YOU (Danet, 2001: 17), but is also used for emphasis, e.g. ...a den katalaveno Na ton kleisoume sto [[PSIHATRIO]], giati eine epikindinos. Kathe vradi... (Greek) '... I don't understand We should put him in a [[PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC]], because he is dangerous. Every night ...' (Tseliga, 2007: 128).

Combining uppercase and lowercase letters in one word is in general recognised to be the style of a person who is trying to act 'elite' but is actually a 'lamer' – someone who is judged to be 'uncool' or 'stupid', and is often considered a 'newbie' (newcomer) (Jacobson, 1999). However, some research into adolescent communication revealed the popularity of this typographic feature (Zvereva, 2012: 106; Scheidt, 2001: 19-20), thus this kind of aesthetics might be associated with young users. In Posidelki, some of these usernames may also semantically suggest young persons, such as *ДюЙмОвОчка* 'Thumbelina' (directed to young audience), *GiRl* (an appellation for a young person), *УлИчНаЯ_ХуЛуГаНка* 'street hooligan' (activity associated with youth), *РеклаМКо* (padonkian spelling – discussed below – that may signify young people); and *RiptoR* (dedicated gamers may also be linked to youth subculture). The effect depends on the individual choice of letter organisation, e.g. it may add some symmetry to the word (*RiptoR, antiMiracle, SainT, eNENeRGY, White AngeL, СаМоЧка_СоБаЧкаII*), or emphasise one of the components (*Ghost XAK, Prosto_YA*) or a specific part of the component (*LariSKA gitaristka, MocaRT, ricARDO, ТЁмыЧ, РеклаМКо, LAlissa*).

Padonkian spelling has appeared in relation to the movement of 'padonki', whose enthusiasts call themselves 'contra-cultural activists who dare to abstract themselves from social norms and rules'. Linguistically, this is expressed by so-called 'erratic spelling' – intentionally misspelling words exploiting certain areas, which Dunn

(2006: 4) describes as ‘problematic’ for standard orthography. The name ‘padonki’ (*падонки*), derived from *подонки* ‘dregs, scum’, is an example of this kind of (mis)spelling. Often, this would mean writing the word phonetically but this is not necessary. As Berdicevskis (2013: 186–187) explains, the phonetic principle can be presented as ‘write as you hear’ while the padonkian spelling seems to follow the principle ‘write **not** what you hear, but what would sound the same’, so that there might be numerous possible ways of erratic spelling of the same word. For example, the word *автор* ‘author’ transliterated as [avtor] may be spelled as *афтар* [aftar], *аффтар* [afftar], *аффтот* [afftor] and *афтор* [aftor], all of which will be transcribed as /ˈa:ftɔr/. In this case, the options are based on two phenomena in Russian orthography. First, the fact that the letters ‘o’ and ‘a’ in the unstressed syllables sound the same (and typically undergo certain level of reduction to /ɔ/ or /ɔ̃/ depending on the position in the word, especially in relation to the stressed syllable, and on neighbouring sounds) has enabled their interchangeable usage. Second, the consonant assimilation in terms of their phonation: when voiced and a voiceless consonants are situated next to each other, they tend to undergo a regressive assimilation (so that the preceding consonant adjusts at the following). Therefore, in the combination ‘*от*’ [vt], [v] becomes devoiced in reference to [t] and it is pronounced as [ft]. Additionally, there does not seem to be any hearable difference between the pronunciation of double ‘фф’ and single ‘ф’ (compare, for example, *супфикс* [suffiks], *аффект* [affekt], *коэффициент* [koeffitsient]), which provides an additional opportunity to create further variants. Other manoeuvres can also be observed, including violation of rules of negation, word creation (e.g. merging two words into one), intentional misuse of grammatical gendering, and misspelling of inflections (e.g. *штоле* [shtole], from *что ли* [shto li] ‘or what?’, *нимагу* [nimagu], from *не могу* [ne mogu] ‘I cannot’, *беспезды* [bespezdy], from *без пизды* [bez pizdy] literally ‘without a cunt’; here ‘certainly, honestly’) (Oliynyk, 2015: 53; Berdicevskis, 2013: 194).

A group of users frequenting the site <http://www.udaff.com> (from the username of *Udav* – the founder and administrator of the website), who refer to themselves as *Real Padonki*, seem to constitute the centre of this activity. They claim a counter-culture status that manifests itself in challenging the mainstream system of values by

creative provocation (Oliyntyk, 2015⁸⁵; Dunn, 2006: 3; Goriunova, 2006: 188; Sidorova, 2006: 33). However, padonki seem rebellious only on the surface. They attract an audience by posing as cool and edgy but their ideology is reminiscent of the current state discourse (e.g. Goriunova, 2006: 187–194, 197). This includes imperialistic sentiments and militarism, an anti-Western stance, a cult of power, aggressive xenophobia, misogyny⁸⁶ and homophobia⁸⁷ as well as explicit expressions of support for Vladimir Putin. Additionally, they offer a limited selection of ‘approved’ models of padonki identities (e.g. Oliyntyk, 2015: 19, 27, 44–45, 53, 96, 102, 120–121, 140 and other). In fact, Kukulyn (2016), who approaches padonki as a political phenomenon, argues that it is actually political strategists’ tool to spread the propaganda of Putin’s regime.

Elements of padonkian spelling can also be observed in usernames and other emblematic elements of CMC, such as in ~!!!Бло}I{e2 ПсЫI}{on@до4кИ!!!~ (i.e.

⁸⁵ Oliyntyk (2015) offers an informative account of <http://www.udaff.com> approached as a community and a literary movement. It should be noted, however, that the author, once a member of the community (Oliyntyk, 2015: 5), occasionally approaches the site as a source of knowledge rather than research material. Particularly striking is her conception of immigration from the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. Having presented one of the literary creations where the character ‘in error’ spits at two Peruvians whom he took to be immigrants from a former Russian republic due to their skin tone, Oliyntyk explains: ‘Padonki racism is usually aimed at illegal immigrants from “stans” – Asian republics of former Soviet Union. Uneducated and often hostile toward Russian culture, these people have flooded Russian cities in search of jobs’ (2015: 139–140). This statement is not only scientifically unfounded (she does not cite a single resource regarding the level of education and hostility or the extent of the migration, but also avowedly justifies padonkian racism. Via negative evaluation (‘uneducated’, ‘hostile’), generalisation (‘these people’) and dehumanisation (‘flooded’), she employs strategies of othering that are common tools for rationalising prejudice and discrimination. What is even more surprising, however, is that this work, as a PhD thesis, has been approved, as stated, by three members of the Graduate Supervisory Committee, which means that this opinion might be taken by some readers to be a valid and authorised way to perceive this problem.

⁸⁶ While I agree with Oliyntyk (2015: 40, 46) that referring to females as ‘cunts’ in itself does not indicate a misogynistic stance as it is a common practice of the community to address both men and women by the names of their genitals, much of the contents of the resource represent females in an objectified, dehumanised and denigrating way.

⁸⁷ Padonki are particularly concerned with male homosexuality. As Oliyntyk (2015: 118) has observed, their attitude towards female homosexuality is ‘ironic rather than negative’ and it is denied recognition by some. This attitude certainly does not indicate tolerance but rather reflects the community’s general attitude toward women, which is characterised by denying their individuality and agency.

бложик психопаточки), where the suffix -er was used instead of -ик (Zvereva, 2012: 106).

Also in *Posidelki*, there are references to ‘padonkian’ phonetic spelling: *Ащцкое_Лулу* (*адское лулу*), *РеклаМКо* (*рекламка*) and *МиЛаШцО=*) (*милашка*).

The latter two can more specifically be described as ‘**the orthographic neuter**’ – a phenomenon based on the similarity in pronunciation of ‘o’ and ‘a’ in the unstressed syllables (Berdicevskis, 2013: 84). Both *рекламка* [reklamka] and *милашка* [milashka] are grammatically feminine, but because Russian words ending with an ‘o’ are typically of the neuter gender, when the unstressed ‘a’ is replaced by ‘o’ they visually seem neuter.

Elongation and repetition have been observed in various languages and are commonly used to reproduce spoken prolonged pronunciation, e.g. ‘Type back soooooooooon!’ (Danet, 2001: 17), or to suggest ‘a clear and cheerful, high-spirited articulation’, as in (Japanese) はじめまして [hajjimemashite], ‘first time to see you’ instead of はじめまして [hajjimemashite] (Nishimura, 2007: 170-171).

These features can also be found in usernames, e.g. *olaa*, *MAGDAAA*, *Marcinnnnnn*, *Ola_Ola*, *ja_ja_cek* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 91), %~SSСромниЦЦааа~% (*скромница*) (Zvereva, 2012: 106). In *Posidelki* we can find examples of elongation and repetition: *Annna*, *otttto*, *Крпстпкааа*, *eNENeRGY*, *easyeas*, *~Lovely_Love~*, *Theodora_Theodora*. Elongation may suggest variation in pronunciation, but might also be a strategy to alter the spelling so that the username is unique and can be registered. For example, Anna is a popular name in *Posidelki*: *Anna*, *Annna*, *annadro*, *Аппу26*, *ANNA-ANUTA*, *Анна*, *анья*, *анька3* and *Анютка*:). In *eNENeRGY* repetition may emphasise certain parts of the username and also affect the aesthetics of the word. *~Lovely_Love~* and *easyeas* looks like playing with phonetic correspondence while extending the semantics.

Baby talk is a speech used while talking to infants characterised by pronunciation that imitates the way young children mispronounce certain sounds. This kind of speech may be read as enhancing informality and expressing affection but also as

humorous and ironic. It may be used in both regular text, e.g. *aćiū* ('thank you') transcribed as *asiu* (Zelenkauskaitė and Herring, 2006: 12), as well as in usernames, e.g. Kfiatuszek < kwiatuszek, Ksyś < Krzyś (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 89). In *Posidelki* there is one example of this type of misspelling: *СолныФко* [solnyfko] instead of *солнышко* [solnyshko] ('little sun', often used as a term of endearment).

Unintentional misspelling is also not uncommon in CMC, for example in the case of non-native speakers (Danet and Herring, 2007b: 13). There are a couple of examples in *Posidelki* that look like transliterations of Russian transcriptions from English: *manki* 'monkey', *superledi* 'superlady', *mirror* 'mirror', *katfrog* 'catfrog', *KilerLedy2008* 'killerlady', *kaligyla* and one username that seems to contain a typo: *Vamprire Ksardas*.

Script, in professional typography, may affect the choice of typographic design as different scripts might require different typographic treatment for optimal legibility. For example, while in the whole of Western Europe the new font styles introduced at the end of the 18th century by the French printing and type producing company 'Didot' spread, and by the first half of the 19th century had replaced any other older types of fonts, in Russia they lasted only some twenty years and then gradually the old styles returned (Shitsgal, 1959: 149).

At the beginning, on the Internet only the ASCII character set was in use. This only supported the English alphabet and the participants had to communicate using this code alone. The 'ASCII bias', however, constituted not just a limitation but also a motivation for typographic innovations and play in ways unique for each linguocultural community (Danet and Herring, 2007a: 556-557; 2007b: 27; Palfreyman and Al Khalil, 2007: 60-61; Su, 2007: 83-84). Nowadays, although the majority of world's writing systems are supported, the habit of typing in Roman script remains in various languages to a smaller or larger extent, which indicates that the choice of script is no longer influenced exclusively by technological reasons (Palfreyman and Al Khalil, 2007; Tseliga, 2007). According to Androutsopoulos (2006: 541), Latin transcription or transliteration of non-Latin alphabets, such as Greek, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew and East Asian ones, is the most visible aspect of transformation that language may undergo on the Internet.

The motivations for using Roman script listed by the users themselves may depend on local linguistic, socio-cultural and political factors. For example, Palfreyman and Al Khalil's (2007: 59-60) survey of 79 students in Dubai revealed that when they chose to use 'Arabenglish' it was typically for the following reasons:

- They found it easier to type in Roman script, which was often related to a greater familiarity with an English keyboard
- To represent vernacular sounds not represented in Arabic script
- Because of positive social connotations, as they felt that educated people tend to write this way as they are more likely to know English (aspirations)
- As a kind of code used by young people (group solidarity)

Tseliga (2007: 129-134) interviewed 25 individuals of various backgrounds on using 'Greeklish' (Greek typed in Roman script), who listed several reasons for using it, such as:

- It is more convenient, faster and easier
- It indicates a trend, a novel writing culture on the Internet that serves practical communicative functions and does not conform to traditional norms (modernity, innovative orientation, busy lifestyle), as well as indicates technological literacy

Availability of two scripts enables greater typographic variability; the choice of the script might also affect the perception of the discourse by the audience. For example, the participants in Tseliga's study (2007: 116):

(...) were found to hold well-developed views on the expected contexts for using Greeklish, reasons for its use, and its peculiarities and aesthetics, expressing interesting opinions about its linguistic nature and the symbolic socio-cultural load it carries.

What is more, Greeklish has gained political supporters and opponents in Greek society, amongst both specialists and the general public (Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou, 2007: 144; Tseliga, 2007: 119).

On RuNet, users can typically choose between Cyrillic and Latin script. Contrary to the above the choice does not involve ideological issues, as there is no official or semi-official version of Latin-based Russian spelling; still, it triggers fervent objections. The reasoning behind the criticism vary from complaints about inconvenience of reading to accusing those using it of laziness, stupidity, showing off or blind devotion to Western culture (Paulsen, 2014: 168). Rather than a strict choice between two alphabets, using Latin script seems limited to occasional and situational instances of incorporation, resulting in a hybrid character of language (Verschik, 2010: 357)⁸⁸. Guseinov (2000) has observed several strategies of integrating Latin script into Cyrillic communication:

- Inserting a fragment of foreign text into Russian text
- Transliterating Russian text into Latin
- Using Cyrillic letters instead of Latin that are in the same place on the keyboard, e.g. 3И stands for PS
- Mixing Cyrillic and Latin letters in one word, e.g. выDOOMыВАТЬ instead of выДУМЫВАТЬ [vydumyvát’]
- Simulating Cyrillic letters using the 12 letters of the Latin alphabet that look like Cyrillic

Using Latin script to write in Russian is often referred to as *translit*. The term derives from ‘transliteration’, but is characterised by a great degree of variation in contrast to the established transliteration systems (Paulsen, 2014: 156-157). Roman script in regular communication seems reduced to specific functions, but is still common in usernames. It enables, for example, coexistence of two identical usernames on the same site, such as *Лука* [lika] and *Lika* (Sidorova, 2006: 96-97).

In *Posidelki*, although communication is conveyed in Cyrillic (except occasional instances of using foreign vocabulary and a part of a conversation that a user typed

⁸⁸ Roman script may be more popular with the handheld devices (e.g. iPhone, iPad and mobile phone) as they create more issues related to typing in Cyrillic, including the cost of messaging. Paulsen (2014: 158-159) explains that one message in Latin contains up to 160 characters while in other alphabets only 70. It should be added, that it only applies to messages written in ASCII as inserting just one diacritical mark reduces the message capacity to 70 characters as well.

from his mobile phone), almost half of the usernames have been typed in Latin script. Some of the usernames typed in Latin script are clearly non-Russian words, especially English, such as: *John Warner, MyDoom, Sleepwalker, NastyGirl, Beauty, blind, you6907, secret555, REALGOD, Hazelnut, SMILE, Sunday, smile1, simple-words, Silk, Fluid, -inception, Bag, Air.*

Similarly, some usernames typed in Cyrillic are clearly of Russian origins: *Анатолий, алексей, НАДЕЖДА, Дмитрий, Создатель Миров, Скиталец, Гитарист, Корсар10000, Лавина эмоций, Маленькая бяка, Психея, Меланхолия, Краля, Царица Ирина, Малышка, Форумчиха, Уличная_Хулиганка, Старушка_Бетти, святой, Небесное Создание, Дамочка, Гость, ветеран, Ангел, Вампириша, призрак, Ватрушка, малиновый десерт, енот, Рябинка, Стрекоза, Незабудка, Анализ, ЧеловекБезИмени.*

In some cases, the consistency of the script has been distorted by:

- typing usernames of Russian origins in Latin: *Masha, Aziatka, Krasavchik, Krasa, Chainik, Plaksa, molod, kulebyaka, Svetliyachok, Nekotenok, alaya_malva, cucushonok, kislota, Raduga, Svetlana, Anatolij, galina5161*
- typing non-Russian names in Cyrillic, e.g. *Фибби* ‘Phoebe’, *Эммель* ‘Ethel’, *Эшли* ‘Ashley’
- inserting an element that does not belong to the given script, e.g. *~Грубая_Нежность~, Стронтив@я, Юльк@*
- creating hybrid formations with both Russian and non-Russian elements, which makes any font irrelevant: *Glamik* (glamour + -ik), *bodiartik* (body + art + -ik), *Джуси Фрутка* (juicy fruit + -ka)
- using Cyrillic letters instead of Latin that are in the same place on the keyboard: *ЗЫ* (PS)

In some instances, it is difficult to assess which script is original for certain usernames, as some popular names have equivalents in many languages, e.g. *viktoriya, Alexandr777, HELEN, Natali88*. In other cases Russian speakers’ native script might be either Cyrillic or Latin. Even further, as Guseinov (2000) indicates, some of the nations of the former USSR changed their writing systems three times in

the last 50-60 years. This might be the case for *amira*, *Farida*, *faruh*, *mahmud*, *maksat* and *Nurbek*.

In the case of borrowing from languages other than English the scripts used seem consistent with the original word: *Шалена* (Ukr.), *Le Soleil* (Fr.), *Mère Susie* (Fr.), *cattiva* (Ital.), *Amigo* (Span.). Only usernames of Japanese origins have been transcribed into either Latin (*Yonaki*, *Katashi*, *Inyasha*) or Cyrillic script (*Харуко* [kharuko], *харука* [kharuka]).

Emoticons are a recognisable feature of CMC and are widely considered ‘an indicator of emotional expressiveness’. They convey nonverbal cues by imitating facial expressions (Tseliga, 2007: 121). Although they are globally used typographic elements, they may differ locally. For example, while English emoticons are typically read sideways, Japanese emoticons (kaomoji) are right-side up and are more varied; moreover, the basic form such as (^_^), (^o^) have their ‘cute’ equivalents: (@ ^—^ @) and (● ^ o ^ ●) represented by other symbols, and indicating additional features such as ‘rosy cheeks’ (Danet and Herring, 2007a: 561).

In *Posidelki*, three persons used a ‘smile’ – *Анютка:)* – and its alternative form – *МуЛаШцО=)* and *В!А!И!Е!РИ!Я=)*. And three used a ‘kiss’ – *Оль:** and *Little_Gabi** – as well as *hameleonxxx*, as the letter ‘x’ also means ‘kiss’. They may be associated with the enhanced informality and friendliness of usernames, may attract attention and encourage communication, and in the case of ‘kisses’ may additionally provide a hint of coquetry.

Representing letters by other symbols is also common in CMC. In non-Latin CMC, letters might be represented by similar looking symbols from ASCII code, e.g. some Arabic letters are often replaced by numbers: <ح> - <7>, <ع> - <3>, <ط> - <6> (Palfreyman and Al Khalil, 2007: 54).

In *Posidelki*, the most common is using @ instead of ‘a’: *Amfit@dmiN*, *Стронтув@я*, *Нарцисс@*, *Sterv@*, *Юльк@*, *ксюш@*, *WoW@*. Two usernames contain \$ instead of ‘s’: *@RTi\$T*, *Ok\$y*. Replacing ч with 4 is used specifically in

Cyrillic⁸⁹: *lapo4ka, T@To4ka, Wilo4ka*. In one username, *k.bl.s.O.*, some letters have been removed and replaced by dots, which has made it ambiguous and with a potential for ‘plurivalence’.

Abbreviations and rebus writing are also widely used in CMC. There are many commonly (and even internationally) used abbreviations, such as LOL, IMHO, CU [see you], pls. [please], tks [thanks]. Other abbreviations are language-specific, e.g. in Japanese: あけおめことよろ [ake ome koto yoro] instead of [akemashite omedetou kotoshimo yoroshiku], ‘New Year’s Greeting/ Happy New Year’ (Nishimura, 2007: 166-168). In general, they serve to speed up typing.

In usernames, abbreviations are a space-saving strategy as there are typically limitations to their length. For example, the first syllable may stand for the full word so that it is easy to decipher, as in (Polish): *Szukkobieturlop* (szukam kobiety, która spędzi ze mną urlop), ‘I’m looking for a woman who will spend holidays with me’; and *INTELIG&PRZYST&ZAMOŻNY&ON27WROC* (inteligentny, przystojny i zamożny dwudziestosiedmiolatek z Wrocławia), ‘Intelligent, handsome and wealthy twenty-seven-year-old male from Wrocław’ (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2003: 97).

In *Posidelki* there are a number of usernames that may look like abbreviated words or phrases, but they are difficult to decipher *rps, PR, LAX, acz, arv, dir10, ntu1108, groes77, ulireuu, BARS5911, turpb, suc95, stra111*.

Numbers are often used to differentiate between the users who selected the same name. Again, this habit may have developed under the influence of email services, which propose system-generated variants for a user who is trying to register with a username that has been taken by another person, and which are typically altered by numbers added. Frequently, these numbers may seem meaningful, and may suggest the following interpretations: year of birth or registration, age, or the subsequent number of a user using the same name. In *Posidelki* some numbers might generate the following associations:

⁸⁹ This came from the habit of texting messages on Russian mobile phones.

- Age: *Anny26, alex25*
- Year of birth: *Syatka93, groes77, adro77, лена66, dru73, OLICS68, suc95, Olga64, integral66*
- Date of birth: *Ulyana13111975* (13/11/1975), *galina5161* (05/01/1961), *Kali13666* (13/06/1966)
- Year of registration on the forum: *KilerLedy2008, Belka2010, Svetik09, shnir2008, JoeJock2007, Margo2009, kid09, lina2011*
- Date of registration: *jana1511* (01/05/2011), *you6907* (06/09/2007), *BARS5911* (05/09/2011), *ntu1108* (01/01/2008 or November 2008), *юлия20112011* (20/11/2011)
- Unclear, and might have some symbolic value for the individual: *Яна111, Юля123, софья570, анька3, stra111, smile1, andrei777, 12наталья, Alexandr777, diana0425, dir10, ita12041, kisa6, kiska25627, Корсар10000, maks777, secret555, 475@Элен*

Other patterns of using typographic symbols might be more typical for users of one language while uncommon for others. For example, Japanese CMC includes frequent usage of stars and musical notes, e.g. 頑張ってくださいっ☆☆☆, 'Please do your best; and ☆☆☆' 見ようと思っくます♪, 'I'm thinking of looking at it ♪' (Nishimura, 2007: 170). As Nishimura (2007: 174) explains:

The message accompanied by the symbols conveys encouragement; the effect of the ☆☆☆ symbols is to cheer up someone in a light-hearted manner. Similarly, the use of musical notes (♪), which denote music and singing, suggests that the writer feels merry, as if about to sing.

In *Posidelki*, there are the following examples of complementing the usernames with non-linguistic symbols that seem to enhance the expressive and aesthetic value of usernames:

- spaces between the letters might be another strategy to emphasise or differentiate the text, which ‘makes it look significant’ (Walker, 2001: 48-52): *n a t a*
- the ‘_’ symbol, commonly used to separate components, might also play a decorative role: *_Alena_*, which illustrates that the same symbol may fulfil various functions
- the ‘~’ symbol also seems to play a decorative role: *~Sweet_Angel~*, *~Malikka~*, *~Jess~*, *~ГрыбаЯ_Нежность~*, *~MAGDALINA~*, *~Angel~*, *~Иль~*, *~Lovely_Love~*; as does the ‘^’ sign in *^Your Obsession^*
- the ‘+’ in *Energy+* and *Nura+* seems to be playing an enhancing or emphasising function
- more sophisticated symbols unavailable from the keyboard, such as *‡DarkNess‡*, *♪Music baby♪*, or combinations of several elements, e.g. *(*_TrinA TyleR_*)*, might be more effective in generating attention than the common or simple ones

5.6.6. Summary

Typography in CMC may take part in identity construction. Typographic elements may supplement the content, contradict the content, or become the content; symbols may co-construct meanings assembled into words, but also without words in their standard form, e.g. ‘a cup’ or c(_). This shows the fluid and provisional character of the meaning and function of linguistic tools and units. Playing with typography may in some cases affect the structure of the entities to the extent that the standard morphological categories are irrelevant, and blur the boundaries between their linguistic and non-linguistic aspects.

In *Posidelki*, we can observe the globally recognised elements, such as Roman script, playing with lettercase, incorporating digits and emoticons, and replacing ‘a’ with ‘@’, as well as local characteristics of Cyrillic script, e.g. ‘4’ instead of ‘ч’ and the local model of a ‘smiley’ =). Some of them might be read as indicating certain

membership categories, such as ‘padonkian’ spelling. Others might be used to place users in certain categories. For example, random usage of lowercase and uppercase might be read as indicating a young person on the one hand, while others may assess it as indicating a ‘lamer’.

The reading of the applied typographic modifications in CMC is based on some commonly acknowledged standards, but these seem largely to refer to common intuition applied to using non-expert typography in general, such as that all caps are used for emphasis. Playing with typography in CMC, such as replacing symbols with other similar symbols, seems intuitive and commonsensical. Also, identifying the meaningful elements of typography is largely intuitive. As the visual modifications in general draw attention, an audience may think that certain parts of text are deliberately highlighted and look for hidden meanings. This is why modified usernames may be more interactive: the named may, intentionally or unintentionally, make the audience engage in playing with meanings that may or may not match those intended by the named.

In general, the collected material proves the Saussurian statement incorrect: the usernames *Валерия* and *В!А!Л!Е!Р!И!Я=*), both derived from the name Valeria, are two different usernames. Emotiveness, affect, irony, exaggeration and other visual tropes that might be expressed by typography are all meaningful.

III

IDENTITY AND THE MEANING OF NAMES

As demonstrated in previous chapters, usernames may display information that can serve for initial evaluation of the interlocutors: to assess gender, to attribute characteristics and assign the user to certain membership categories, to recognise communicative compatibility, to identify proposed types of relationships, and to evaluate creativity and other. This is in line with what has been demonstrated in relation to names in general: that they reflect the common understandings of the concepts of identities, allocate people to specific categories, and in this way create some associations and expectations.

Does this prove that names have meaning, i.e. play a role in ‘constructing, developing, and maintaining one’s identity’, as Brennen (2000: 139) defines the meaning of names? I propose to consider two criteria of assessment in response to those who claim to have demonstrated that names have no meaning: their use by competent users in natural settings and their role in the process of constructing the identity of the named person.

First, as has been stated before (p. 25), García-Ramírez (2010: 13) argues that names have no meaning, and *competent users*, who are speakers ‘able to use a name successfully for the purposes at hand and according to the applicable standards’, do not have to understand or know anything about a specific name to use it successfully.

It has been demonstrated that usernames carry information and might serve to assign users to membership categories. However, to reiterate, being categorisable in one or another way does not automatically mean that these categories will ever play a role in identity construction, i.e. will be made relevant in interaction, where relevance indicates impact in the course of interaction (thus, reference does not imply relevance) (Schegloff, 2007a: 468). This means that to prove that interlocutors orient to identities displayed in usernames it has to be demonstrated how this is done in the actual interaction. In this way we can present how competent speakers utilise usernames, and whether or not they need to understand them.

Second, according to Brennen (2000: 143), although the semantic content of names may occasionally become relevant, it only happens upon initial encounter; in subsequent encounters names cease generating any associations and are processed as nonsense words, and thus have no lasting effect on the identity of the named. This, in turn, means, that to prove that the role of names in the process of identity construction is ongoing we should observe the process of identity construction across a number of interactions between the same interlocutors.

The studies so far have approached usernames as static elements of CMC and highlighted their role in generating first impressions. According to Hassa (2012: 202), usernames serve to ‘introduce the web persona to the digital community’, to ‘establish an online identity that is recognizable to others’ and to ‘attract contacts’. Also according to Lev and Lewinsky (2004), images based on usernames influence interlocutors’ reactions, including their decision to undertake interaction. Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008) proposes that usernames represent participants’ bodies, enabling the recognition of gender. Stommel (2007) presents usernames as fixed emblems. According to Bechar-Israeli (1995), they are used to represent and recognise the participants. Participants may also build up their virtual personality and reputation on a stable username, but the role of the content of usernames in this process has not been demonstrated. Heisler and Crabill (2006) demonstrate how usernames are interpreted when first seen. Hagström (2012) focuses on the first impressions related to certain types of usernames. Danet (1995) and Danet et al. (1997) compare usernames to masks supposed to disguise real identities, attract attention and generate specific reactions. Androutsopoulos (2006: 525) has described usernames as ‘acts of self-presentation that are designed for and displayed to, rather than negotiated with, an audience’. According to Sidorova (2006: 74), usernames are ‘means of pre-communicational self-presentation’, while according to Bays (1998) they serve to produce a first impression by presenting desired aspects of the *face* that the participant wants to display. Thus, these studies focus on the role of usernames at the initial stage of potential relationships. Some of them cite excerpts of communication, e.g. Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008), Bays (1998) and Bechar-Israeli (1995), but they typically either present first encounters (and thus do not demonstrate

durability) or do not clearly present how the username affects the interaction (and thus do not demonstrate relevance).

A similar issue concerns the studies of names in general. Names might be presented as socially meaningful and descriptive of the individual. For example, Agyekum (2006: 209) argues that the meanings of names have two aspects: synchronic and diachronic. Synchrony relates to what triggered the choice of the name. For example, in the case of circumstantial names, it will be those elements of the circumstances at birth from which the name originated. Then the meaning of the name evolves along with the life history of the named individual, which constitutes its diachronic aspect: 'people expect the inherent power of words in names to reflect the lives of people either positively or negatively'. For example, if an Akan is named after a dignitary they are expected to behave accordingly 'so that nobody makes derogatory remarks about the name in attempt to denigrate it'. Again, this demonstrates that names might be used to categorise individuals, and might carry various information about them. However, this type of literature presents hardly any evidence of how names function in everyday life and how they contribute to shaping the identities of the named in everyday interaction, such as how the expectations reflected in names are expressed or executed, or in what ways the named comply with or reject the values imposed on them by the naming act.

In line with the ethnomethodological approach, noting that some attribute is bound with some category should not be treated as the result of the enquiry. Rather, it might be described following Schegloff (2007a: 465) as 'articulated embodiments of "anyman's" vernacular or common-sense understandings – understandings whose basis or grounding is the goal of inquiry, not its premises'. For the researcher, what is important is the process by which categories and attributes are made to belong together. This process is accomplished locally by interacting individuals, which means that it can only be observed in specific interactions. Thus, if we are starting with non-conversational data, we are presenting a problem, not offering the solution (Schegloff, 2007a: 463-465; 473-476). As Fitzgerald and Housley (2015: 8) explain, while there are any number of ways categories, devices and their associated actions

can be configured prior to their use, it is only through their use in any particular situation that they become operative for the participants.

1. Conversation analysis

The key phenomena to facilitate production and understanding of the social reality are interaction and talk. As the conversation represents both interacting and talking, and is a crucial element of everyday communication, it also constitutes a favourite object of EM study. I am therefore also going to use conversation, although not performed face-to-face, as research material to look for evidence of how a username may participate in constructing the identity of its bearer. To do this, I will use Conversation Analysis (CA), another, next to MCA, research tool related to ethnomethodology.

CA first appeared in the work of the sociologist Sacks and his students and colleagues Jefferson and Schegloff in the 1960s and 1970s. Typical data that this type of study uses are transcriptions of everyday, naturally occurring interactions, such as face-to-face conversations or phone calls, as opposed, for example, to interviews, fieldnotes or experiments that are more prone to researchers' bias (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 57-58). CA focuses on what people do when they are talking to each other, and what social actions are undertaken in conversation (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 3).

Conversation is organised in sequences. A *sequence* consists of actions – turns that are related to each other so that the previous one serves as a background, or a context, to the following one; as Schegloff (1968: 1083) calls it, utterances must be *conditionally relevant* to form a complete sequence. An exchange of greetings might serve as a simple example. *Sequence* is thus the basic meaningful unit of interaction (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992: 191-192). A conversational sequence is reflected by the formula *ababab*, where 'a' and 'b' are the conversation participants (Schegloff, 1968: 1076). Anything that is done in the course of conversation is thus embedded and observable in its structure that is used; everything that is said is constantly adjusted and meaningful in light of what was said before that (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 5-6).

Identity ‘production’ is also a function of communication, ‘something that is part and parcel of the routines of everyday life, brought off in the fine detail of everyday interaction’ (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 1). A conversation might be analysed to reveal by what means and strategies identities are claimed or ascribed to others: ‘The analytic task is to delineate the descriptive devices, the properties of categories in talk, the technical skills of conversation which are employed in the service of mobilizing identities’ (Widdicombe, 1998: 191). As an EM-related method, CA also recommends restraining from application or testing of any theoretical assumptions, which distinguishes this approach from others:

Whereas critics seem to be primarily concerned with empirical investigations of identity from the ‘ground up’ to see how they fit with observations about the social construction of identities, or the postmodern state of identities, conversation analysts are not concerned with performing some kind of test of the goodness of fit. Instead, the point is that this work is of value in itself. (Widdicombe, 1998: 206)

It is important to strictly focus on how participants interpret the situation in which they take part. We cannot assume that certain identity is relevant in the interaction unless we can demonstrate that it is relevant to the participants, namely, that it affects the course of interaction (for example through application of some kind of power or producing any other form of inequality). The effects can be observable in any aspect of the interaction: its ‘trajectory, content, character, organisational procedures’ (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 60-63).

1.2. Conversation analysis in CMC

CMC, both synchronous and asynchronous, is commonly considered, referred to and analysed as conversation (e.g. Stommel and Koole, 2010; Androutsopoulos, 2006; Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 243-279; Herring and Panyametheekul, 2003). It is characterised by a number of properties and adaptations that make it resemble oral conversation, such as: turn-taking, ‘topic development via step-wise moves’, conventions of address and code-switching as observed in conversations, efforts to gain and maintain the conversational floor, typographic representations of spoken prosody, chunking text to resemble conversational pace, ‘quoting’ to restore the context, ‘modifying turn-taking to optimise temporal resources’, ‘using private

messaging as a “back channel” in group discussion’ and ‘expressing frustration when messages digress off-topic’ (Herring, 2011: 5; Herring, 2010: 4).

Importantly from an ethnomethodological viewpoint, CMC seems to be experienced as conversation by its users. It tends to be referred to as ‘talking’ rather than ‘writing’ or ‘typing’, and its social function seems similar to that of face-to-face or telephone conversation. In general, it seems that it is not the medium that should determine whether or not a certain exchange of messages is or is not a conversation (Herring, 2010: 2-5). So far, CA has been used in CMC research for example to observe its structure (see Herring, 2013 for examples and a literature review).

The most important difference between face-to-face and computer-mediated conversations is seen in the organisation of turns in CMC. The main concern is disruption of the communication order of turn-taking that is typical for face-to-face communication, ‘resulting in disrupted turn adjacency and overlapping exchanges’, which, in turn, may affect the relevance between the turns (Herring 2010: 2). As Herring (2013: 248) puts it:

Especially pertinent (...) is the fact that most CMC servers distribute messages in the linear order in which they are received, without regard for what they are responding to. This often results in disrupted adjacency of otherwise logically-related turns (Herring 1999), especially when two or more people are communicating at the same time. (...) Disrupted adjacency results in unintended relevance violations, which can cause online conversations to appear incoherent.

If the main difference between face-to-face and CMC lies in the organisation of turns, which is the key concept of CA, is CA still suitable for CMC? What exactly does the distorted turn-taking look like in CMC, and what consequences does it have for studying CMC? Let us see how ‘adjacency’ is related to the notion of relevance. The notion of ‘adjacency’ in CA is used to describe ‘a class of sequences’ called *adjacency pairs* (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). This type of sequences, as they state, is characterised by the following features:

- two-utterance length
- adjacent positioning of component utterances
- different speakers producing each utterance

- relative ordering of parts (i.e. first pair parts precede second pair parts)
- discriminative relations (i.e. the pair type of which a first pair part is a member is relevant to the selection among second parts)

In addition, there is a ‘basic rule of adjacency pair operation’:

[G]iven the recognizable production of a first pair part on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognizably a member.

Thus, when Herring (2013: 249) states, ‘As a consequence, adjacency pairs are not infrequently disrupted’, one could ask if a phenomenon like ‘disrupted adjacency pair’ exists, since the *adjacent positioning* is one of the constitutive features for this specific type of sequence. For example, when an answer follows the question directly, they form an adjacency pair, but it does not happen all the time – the interlocutor may just say something else before answering the question and this is not CMC-specific. When the concern is the multi-user character of CMC as a major factor in the occurrence of disruptions (Herring, 2013), the following rule may offer a solution:

The *abab* formula is a specification, for two-party conversations, of the basic rule for conversation: one party at a time. The strength of this rule can be seen in the fact that in a multi-party setting (more precisely, where there are four or more), if more than one person is talking, it can be claimed not that rule has been violated, but that more than one conversation is going on. (Schegloff, 1968: 1076)

This can be illustrated by Herring’s own examples, especially the example (3) used to illustrate that ‘Clearly, exchanges that are constantly interrupted by irrelevant messages do not obey the principle of sequential relevance’ (Herring 2013: 253-254):

In example (3), two ongoing conversations are interleaved. This becomes easier to see when the irrelevant messages are omitted from each conversation, resulting in two separate exchanges, as shown in (3') and (3''):

3')

[1] <ashna> hi jatt

[4] <Jatt> ashna: hello?

[6] <ashna> how are u jatt
[9] <Jatt> ashna: do we know eachother?. I'm ok how are you
[14] <ashna> jatt no we don't know each other, i fine
[15] <Jatt> ashna: where r ya from?

3")

[3] <Dave-G> kally i was only joking around
[5] <kally> dave-g it was funny
[8] <Dave-G> kally you da woman!
[12] <kally> dave-g good stuff:)

Thus, it makes more sense to consider the sample not as one single stream of constantly interrupted communication but a number of separate conversations conducted simultaneously. In general, as for the assessment of what forms a sequence, adjacency between the turns is neither a condition nor a guarantee of relevance: 'Clearly the mere fact that two events occur in close proximity to each other does not establish that participants treat these events as a sequence of actions tied to each other' (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992: 191).

This is just an example showing that technically the status of CMC as a type of conversation can still be disputed. Every conversation, to some extent, is shaped by the medium; for example, in face-to-face communication also a facial expression or gesture may constitute a turn – shaking one's head or nodding is a valid response to a question – while there is no such option on the phone. In general, CA seems a suitable method to analyse CMC.

1.3. Names in conversation

As I am going to observe how usernames function in interaction, I will first look into the role of names in conversation in general. We know that they serve as terms of reference and address. As terms of reference and address, they might be used to reflect and negotiate relational categories by selection amongst alternative forms of names (as well as other terms of reference and address). We also know that etymologically transparent names might evoke certain qualities similarly to terms of

categorisation. What we are now interested in is if names are used similarly to terms of categorisation in interaction, and if the impact of semantics is limited to the first encounter with the specific name. This will show if names have a durable effect on the construction of the identity of the named. This I will try to demonstrate using the method of CA.

In the field of CA, names have gained some attention as one of the means of reference and address. Although referring to people in conversation is not the most popular topic within CA study (Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007), it generated interest from the beginning of development of this research method because of its ‘nearly-omnipresence’ in conversation (Butler et al., 2011; Halonen, 2008; Enfield and Stivers, 2007; Schegloff, 2007b; Schegloff, 1996; Sacks and Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1972)⁹⁰. As an obvious option for referring, names are typically an element of these types of studies; however, studies dedicated specifically to the role of names in interaction are rare.

1.3.1. Functions of names in interaction

Names may play a number of roles in conversation. First, they are used to indicate the direction of communication by specifying the next speaker (Sacks et al., 1974). However, as observed by Jefferson (1973), when it is technically not necessary, e.g. when there are only two people interacting, they are still often used. This shows that they must also play other roles. Jefferson (1973: 48) herself has formulated one of these functions as ‘loci for formulating, maintaining and reformulating the status of a relationship’ (Jefferson, 1973: 48). Butler et al. (2011: 339) have observed that in telephone counselling the names of the callers were used repeatedly by counsellors when they were ‘disaligning and/or disaffiliating with the activity or stance done in the previous turns’, as if framing this particular fragment of talk as separate. According to Butler et al. (2011: 354-356), the function of this strategy may be to

⁹⁰ In 2007, there appeared two important collections of articles dedicated to referring to persons in interaction. One was a special issue of *Discourse Studies* 9 (4) edited by Lerner and Kitzinger, and the other was a book edited by Enfield and Stivers, containing works considering systems of person reference in other languages and cultures, such as Senft (2007) on the Kilivila language, Enfield (2007) on Lao speakers and Sidnell (2007) on one Caribbean community on the Bequia island.

encourage focus on the problem at hand, highlight the importance of the utterance, and mitigate the potentially problematic action (such as ceasing the activity done in the past turn, initiating a new activity, reversing the order of speaking or presenting a different stance than that of the caller). This also has a relationship maintaining effect, e.g. reinforces the position of the counsellor as the one authorised to control the course of interaction.

Also, the choice between a name and another form of address or reference has been presented as socially meaningful. To diverge from the typically discussed expression of social hierarchy as well as distance and familiarity, Haviland (2007: 232) presents the ‘conspiratorial or duplicitous nature of choosing one referring expression over another’ by a group of men engaged in gossip.

De Stefani (2012, 2009) and Pepin (2009), on the other hand, focus specifically on the role of proper names (perhaps place names in particular, see De Stefani, 2012 and De Stefani et al., 2012) in the interaction. Their studies are also based on the CA as an analytic method, but also refer to onomastics to consider linguo-cultural characteristics of proper names, such as their origins, classes, forms and evolution, an approach they call ‘interactional onomastics’ (De Stefani, 2009; Pepin, 2009: 800). They propose to consider proper names not ‘as a pre-defined analytic unit, but as a category that emerges from interaction’ and emphasise the collaborative character of their usage (De Stefani and Pepin, 2006: 161), which is in line with how MCA perceives categories in general – as interactionally negotiated rather than predetermined.

Within this study area, Pepin (2009) takes on board personal names: he presents what functions names may play in classroom interactions. He demonstrates strategies used by teachers to gain students’ attention that shows that first names are not just used for simple reference, but are context-sensitive devices that play a role in accomplishing interactional and social goals.

Rymes (1996), on the other hand, focuses on the functioning of an individual name, by referring to Searle’s (1958) idea of names as ‘pegs’ on which to hang meanings. She presents how an individual nicknamed *Little Creeper* adds new values to his

nickname along with gaining experience as a gang member. Thus, we can say that the meanings attached to this name are negotiated in various forms of interactions and accrue on an ongoing basis, but this process is not directly related to the semantics of the nickname.

1.3.2. Categorisation in interaction

We have seen that names can categorise individuals by the way they are used, namely, by choosing one form of name over another as well as by choosing to avoid using the name. But can the semantics of names play a role in interaction and, what is more, influence the construction of one's identity?

According to Schegloff (2007b: 434), first, 'reference' and 'categorisation' are two different things: 'terms for categories of persons can be used to do referring, but they can also be used to do other actions, such as describing'. Second, names in conversation are used to refer and not to categorise: 'referring to persons can be done by use of terms for categories of persons, but can also be done by use of other resources, such as names'. The relationship between the names and identity of the named is that names serve as 'recognitionals', i.e. they enable the recipient to identify the referent (Sacks and Schegloff, 2007 [1979]: 24-25). Thus, names are not terms for categories. This is somewhat reminiscent of Coates' (2006b: 356) statement about the contradiction between proper and semantic references (p. 28).

Yet, there are, although only few, examples that can be said to demonstrate how semantics of names may be used to categorise. Goodwin (2003: 130-135) presents analysis of conversations where shared association with the brand name *Cord* was the conversational strategy to claim and assess membership in the *car buffs* category. We can compare the way that the name *Cord* functions amongst *car buffs* to the functioning of the category *gwaffs* presented by Schegloff (2007b: 446) that was 'owned' and 'managed' by teenagers in South Carolina in the mid-1970s, but not by adults. Similarly, *Cord* can be said to be 'owned' and 'managed' by *car buffs* but not the rest of the population, and competent usage requires understanding of this term.

To present the categorising function of personal names, Clifton (2013) uses data from a web-TV interview with Marine Le Pen, president of the National Front, and the subsequent comments on this interview posted on a news forum, to present how certain members of a population became objects of categorisation in reference to their names. Namely, having a 'French name' or 'foreign-sounding name' has been conceptualised as a criterion to assess assimilation into French society. This study demonstrates interactional construction of the link between names and cultural identity, and therefore proves that names might be used to categorise. However, the categorisation is not directly related to the semantics of names but to subjective opinions on what counts as a foreign-sounding name and, first of all, to the choice of the name.

Haviland (2007: 228, 233-234) may be said to have demonstrated categorisation related to semantics of names for persons. In his analysis of the conversation in the group of gossiping men, some nicknames, such as *Lazy Domingo* and *Small Lazy Domingo*, were used both for reference (to pick up an object to talk about) as well as to characterise the referent and to point what aspect of identity will be discussed. In addition, in the case of gossiping it was certainly not the first encounter with these names – as Haviland (2007: 226) puts it: 'Stories told "on" a person may be scandalous or innocent, but they are most delectable when interlocutors know who the person is.' It still lacks the emphasis of the continuity of the process across a number of interactions to demonstrate that this event is not of an incidental character, but it definitely indicates that names have the potential to function as terms for categorisation in interaction, as well as to have a lasting effect on the construction of identity of the so-named person.

1.3.3. Username in interaction

Not many works present examples of usernames, or explain their functioning, in conversations (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Taras, 2003; Fedorova, 2002). Fedorova (2002) has analysed usernames as an element of conversational play; they were referred to in jokes and word-playing comments, as in these examples:

Example 1.

Китайский лазутчик: Ну наконец-то я здесь. Вылез из плена тормозного Интернета... ‘**Chinese scout:** Made it eventually. Got out of the captivity of laggy Internet...’

Example 2.

Lotta: Сезонному охотнику, привет, а кто твоя дичь – если не секрет?
‘**Lotta:** To Seasonal hunter, welcome, and who’s your prey – if it’s not a secret?’

Taras (2003) analysed the style and content of comments on articles published on the Polish Internet portal Onet.pl as well as comments on previous comments. She has observed that many usernames were descriptive, either self-characterising (e.g. *DUMNY BIELSZCZANIN* ‘proud Bielsk-dweller’) or expressing views and emotions related to the main text or preceding comments, often in a jocular or offensive way. For example, a user named *abortus* expressed disagreement with one of the preceding comments: ‘za takie słowa, matka powinna cię “wyskrobać”, gdyby wiedziała, że je wypowiesz!!!!!! !!!!!!’ (‘for these words, your mother should have “scraped you out”, had she known you would utter them!!!!!! !!!!!!’).

Del-Teso-Craviotto (2006) has focused on ‘the conversational negotiation of eroticism and desire’ in English and Spanish dating chat-rooms hosted by AOL. She demonstrated how usernames played a role of masks used to facilitate the creation of alternative selves and to separate the context of playful exchange from reality as a strategy of engagement in erotic or flirtatious actions without being accused of violating social norms. Usernames also constituted elements of the game; for example, *Godzfreekyest* was modified to *Godzhorniest* to give it a sexual meaning, by changing the adjective while maintaining the structure of the username.

Bechar-Israeli (1995) has also presents how usernames are made relevant in conversations, both as their topic, such as expressing concerns about ‘stolen’ usernames, as well as a part of the conversational play, such as ‘trying on’ various usernames to find a suitable one or temporarily changing one as a reaction to the

current topic, ‘swapping’ usernames with interlocutors, and directly referring to the semantics of selected username, e.g. a username *HollyCow* received comments about ‘butcherring’ them, while *god* provoked reactions like ‘oh my god’ or ‘now i know god exists’.

These studies demonstrate how interactants refer to usernames in the conversations; however, they do not present evidence of lasting effects of usernames on the identities of the named users.

2. Construction of consistent identity

Irrespective of how theorists conceptualise the notion of identity, people typically perceive themselves and others as stable and aggregate entities rather than fluid and fragmented constructs of an uncertain ontological status (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 68-69). On this occasion, names, as ‘recognitionals’ (Sacks and Schegloff, 2007 [1979]), play an important role – in the absence of the body, they stand for the person’s identity and facilitate its perceived continuity. This function of names is crucial in text-based CMC. But is it the only function of usernames in constructing the durability of users’ identities?

How people construct and maintain durable identities and this way sustain their self-perception as defined, stable beings, in line with ethnomethodology, seems to have to do with repetition and accumulation, which work, in fact, is never finished. Sacks’s (1984b: 414) explanation of how the identity of ‘an ordinary person’ is fulfilled in everyday life is a good illustration of this process:

Whatever you may think about what it is to be an ordinary person in the world, an initial shift is not [to] think of ‘an ordinary person’ as some person, but as somebody having as one’s job, as one’s constant preoccupation, doing ‘being ordinary’. It is not that somebody is ordinary; it is perhaps that that is what one’s business is, and it takes work, as any other business does. If you just extend the analogy of what you obviously think of as work – as whatever it is that takes analytic, intellectual, emotional energy - then you will be able to see that all sorts of nominalized things, for example, personal characteristics and the like, are jobs that are done, that took some kind of effort, training, and so on.

We can extend these observations to any other identity. To be recognised as ‘being’ a member of a certain category of people, or ‘having’ a certain identity, and to display stability and continuity of one or another characteristic, can be achieved by enacting this characteristic consistently at different times and in different situations. This is well illustrated by the case of Agnes, an intersex person, described by Garfinkel (1967: 116-185). Agnes, to give a convincing account of consistency of her female identity, enacted it not just by the means of appropriate attire and behaviour but also by references to her personal history where she ‘never felt or behaved like a boy’, and by bringing up instances to support it, based on her understanding of what makes a ‘natural’ female.

Thus, to observe how the continuity of an aspect of identity is performed in interaction, we should monitor an individual across a number of interactions. This is not typically done in the field of CA or CMC research. A study that uses elements of CA and focuses on one subject presents a 12-year-old girl in various aspects of her life: as a student, a daughter, a friend and a classmate (Honan et al., 2000). It is based on qualitative analysis of ‘multiple ethnographic case study of four adolescents and their literacy practices at home and at school’, including audiotapes, transcripts of interviews and lessons, and field notes presented in the form of ‘snapshots’ of specific situations. Special attention is paid to the process of how Hannah’s status of a recognised ‘model student’ is constructed: how she repeatedly enacts being a good student and is assessed as such by others witnessing her classroom performance, and in comparison to the behaviours of other participants. This study also demonstrates how various identities, sometimes contrasting, might co-exist in one person, e.g. how an obedient, dutiful, quiet, well-behaved student is at the same time an author and performer of ‘bawdy skits’ for her classmates that ‘parody aspects of modern life’, often in a ‘sexually or socially daring’ way (Honan et al., 2000: 16-24). It appears that there might be a correlation among the various identities: the fact that she is perceived as a model student makes her performances seen as ‘outlets (presumably for creative energy)’, ‘the extension of genres’, ‘talent and engagement in fantasy’, ‘being dramatic’ and ‘having fertile imagination’ rather than ‘transgressing boundaries’ or otherwise inappropriate behaviour (Honan et al., 2000: 22).

So we can say that repetition and ongoing enactment enable the construction and maintenance of identities that are perceived as stable or permanent. On the other hand, to be recognised as being a particular type of person, this must be performed in the way that others recognise as a valid way of claiming this category membership. Similarly, to show that names have a lasting effect on the identity, we have to observe repeated performances of this aspect of identity where semantics of names play a role and demonstrate that the competent usage of the name requires its understanding by the interlocutors.

2.1. Constructing durable identities online

Similarly, in CMC users apply various strategies to build up identifiable, consistent personae, such as signatures, avatars, role adoption, self-disclosure and description (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 252).

Whether described as a *face*, *emblem* or *mask*, usernames are the key ‘recognitionals’ that enable identification of our interlocutors. Participants often use them for long periods of time. When they decide to change one they inform their interlocutors about the change, they might get upset when their preferred username is taken by somebody else, and they care for the reputation attached to their usernames (Swennen, 2001; Bechar-Israeli, 1995). Thus, we may say that relatively durable identities might be built upon usernames, so that, for example, when a participant with a familiar username displays inconsistencies with the previous performance, their interlocutors might suspect impersonation (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008; Stommel, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2006; Bechar-Israeli, 1995).

As usernames accompany every post of a specific user, they can be compared to ‘transportable identities’ that are ‘latent identities that “tag along” with individuals as they move through their daily routines’ such as ‘male’, ‘young’ and ‘white’ (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 70). However, identity work is not complete when the username is selected, but is ongoing and continues in the further interactions (Herring and Martinson, 2004; Herring, 2003; Desser, 2000). To reiterate, in ethnomethodology, it is important to distinguish between identities that are perceptible and those that are relevant, or oriented to in interaction. As Zimmerman (1998: 91) explains:

[I]t is important to distinguish between the registering of visible indicators of identity and oriented-to identity which pertains to the capacity in which an individual should act in a particular situation. Thus, a participant may be aware of the fact that a co-interactant is classifiable as a young person or a male without orienting to those identities as being relevant to the instant interaction.

Thus, the fact that usernames display some identities does not mean that they are ever made relevant in further communication. In addition, if we are interested in the role of usernames in constructing identities of a durable character, we need to demonstrate that those identities are made relevant repeatedly.

2.2. Concerns about the approach to identity in CA

There is one issue regarding using ethnomethodological methods of MCA and CA to research identity construction that should be noted, namely, how to spot those aspects of the interaction that present identity constructing activities, making sure that the findings are not researcher-imposed. The problem, as has been pointed several times, is that identity relevance in communication often works in the background and is rarely made explicit; the functioning of the kind of mechanism that would prove the relevance of a certain identity or social category, such as power execution, tends to have an implicit, if not hidden, character. Therefore, it remains obscure what criteria to apply to identify appropriate data (Stokoe, 2012: 278-279).

According to Stokoe (2012: 278-279), this is an important reason that MCA remains a rather unpopular aspect of the ethnomethodological research – because of the problematic ‘capturability’ of ‘categorical phenomenon’, as illustrated by similar concerns from both discourse and conversation analysts:

We cannot ‘simply go into the field and observe how, when, where, and with whom people talk with others about [identity] groups...Finding data...would amount to a search for the proverbial needle in the haystack’ (Van Dijk, 1987: 18, 119)

Because we cannot know in advance when a person will explicitly invoke a... category, there is no way to plan data collection of them...collections...in all likelihood, would not be instances of the same interactional phenomenon. (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005: 154)

And so conversation analysts have argued that ‘establishing the mechanisms by which a specific identity is made relevant and consequential in any particular episode of interaction has remained...elusive (Raymond and Heritage, 2006: 677).

2.2.1. Solution – stance?

Perhaps applying the concept of *stance* as a lens to observe a course of conversation could help. Stance seems a suitable tool to combine with CA and MCA. It draws on the interactive character of human communication and its sequential structure; emphasises the dialogic nature of the stancetaking formula, drawing attention to turn-by-turn negotiation of stance, and participants’ shared context; and enables observation from the participants’ viewpoint. It may serve as a technical aid to identify the relevant details to study. It conveniently splits the speech act into components and presents the relationships between them by a scheme represented by a triangle. Once we have mapped the scheme onto the speech act under scrutiny, we can, first, by observation of the relationships between the components, identify the meaningful elements, and, second, we can ‘turn’ the triangle so that we find the angle of enquiry that suits our purpose. To explain what can be done with ‘stance’ we can refer to Sacks (1984b: 413):

The gross aim of the work I am doing is to see how finely the details of actual, naturally occurring conversation can be subjected to analysis that will yield the technology of conversation. The idea is to take singular sequences of conversation and tear them apart in such a way as to find rules, techniques, procedures, methods, maxims (a collection of terms that more or less relate to each other and that I use somewhat interchangeably) that can be used to generate the orderly features we find in the conversations we examine. The point is, then, to come back to the singular things we observe in a singular sequence, with some rules that handle those singular features, and also, necessarily, handle lots of other events.

Stance may serve as a tool to methodically ‘tear apart’ a sequence, to extract the meaningful details for analysis, and to collect ‘orderly features’ in the examined conversation as well as identify factors (such as usernames) that might technically be beyond the current of the conversation but still constitute its important element.

2.2.1.A. What is a stance?

According to Du Bois (2007: 169), who has produced probably the most well-known comprehensive theoretical synthesis of this phenomenon, stance is:

(...) a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field.

From the viewpoint of the speaker-stancetaker, Du Bois paraphrases this as: ‘I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you’ (2007: 163). Thus, we can say that any time we do something meaningful to communicate, we take a stance. As Du Bois (2007: 170) explains, his goal of bringing together all the properties of stance in ‘a unified framework for stance’ is to provide a framework for understanding the relations that are present in all dialogic interaction and to clarify how these relations are constituted through the act of stance. The idea of ‘stance’ incorporates a number of concepts from various fields and authors, amongst whom some of the most important contributions are Schegloff (1979, 1990, 2001) as well as Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

2.2.1.B. How does it work?

Du Bois represents the concept of stance in the graphical form of a triangular scheme, called ‘the stance triangle’ (Figure 1).

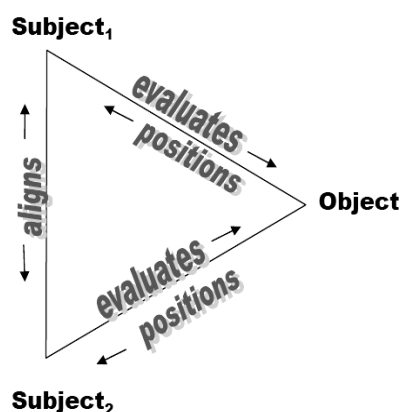


Figure 1: The stance triangle by Du Bois (2007: 163)

The acts of evaluating, positioning and aligning that we can see on the illustration constitute three different aspects of stance ‘distinguishable from the others by virtue of its own distinctive consequences’, but they are also ‘yoked together through their integration in the dialogic stance act’ (Du Bois, 2007: 162-163). The shape of the picture represents the interactional nature of stance. It also reflects its sequential and ongoing character: ‘(...) the stance act is not necessarily complete within a single intonation unit, clause, sentence, or even turn’. The act of stance is realised against a shared background that might be dynamically constituted by the participants in the very act of stancetaking (Du Bois, 2007: 141, 157, 161, 171). Those elements of stance – interactivity, sequentiality and shared background – are also the key qualities of interaction to consider in the CA study.

Each node of the triangle represents one of the key entities/components of the concept of stance – the first subject, the second subject, and the (shared) stance object – while the sides represent the three actions/relationships among them: evaluating, positioning and aligning, and their directions. As Du Bois (2007: 164) argues, all the basic components are relevant in the case of any stancetaking act, irrespective of whether the specific information is stated in the utterance directly, or spread across dialogic exchange by multiple participants. Thus, each stancetaking act consists of three acts in one. In a single stancetaking act, the stancetaker (Du Bois 2007: 143-144):

1. **Evaluates an object:** orients to an object of a stance and characterises it as having some specific quality or value
2. **Positions a subject** (usually the self): situates a social actor with respect to responsibility for the stance and for invoking sociocultural value
3. **Aligns with other subjects:** calibrates the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers

Du Bois (2007) illustrates this with a number of examples, such as the following:

in addition, certain predictions and expectations regarding the process and outcome of a specific research, and will affect the way of analysing and interpreting. It enables us to make deductions about the unexpressed elements of the triangle as long as the remainder is known: ‘Crucially for the analysis, all three of the three-in-one subsidiary acts remain relevant to stance interpretation even if only one or two of them are overtly expressed in the linguistic form of the stance utterance. The stance triangle shows how a stance utterance that specifies only one of the three vectors can allow participants to draw inferences about the others.’ In the ‘cases where it may not be obvious that the full stance triangle is in play, it is usually possible to break the triangle down into its component vectors (e.g. an individual stance vector representing the subject-object evaluative relation), and thereby to achieve an insightful, if partial, analysis of stance’ (Du Bois, 2007: 151-168).

According to Du Bois (2007: 173), the brief summary of the complex concept of stance, to grasp its core idea, a ‘take-home message’, can be articulated as follows: ‘Stance is an act of evaluation owned by a social actor’. This short summary, he argues, incorporates three key aspects of social life: act, responsibility and value. Ownership is ‘the glue that binds the stance act together with actor responsibility and sociocultural value, so that all is linked to a social actor with a name, a history, an identity.’ This aspect of stance will be important in the present work, as I will focus on how the identity and the history of a social actor are constructed in the interaction in relation to the actor’s name. Stances might be seen as building blocks of aspects of our identity: what stances we own, willingly or unwillingly, defines who we are as social beings, which becomes particularly clear in the research on imposed stances and distorted agency in stancetaking (Coupland and Coupland, 2009; Irvine, 2009). As our place in social matrix concerns all engaged parties, the identities are results of collective work. To cite Du Bois (2007: 173) again:

As players in the language-game of stance, we've all got some skin in the game. We make it our business to know where the other players stand, who they stand with, and where they're headed. And we care about the state of the game, too: how it is played, who plays it well and fairly, in what condition the players leave the turf- and what all of this implies for the environs of sociocultural value in which we all must live.

In CMC it also ‘is important to know an interlocutor’s identity in order to understand and evaluate the interaction’ (Herring and Martinson, 2004: 425). How important it is can be illustrated by the fact that CMC participants seem to make up the ‘missing’ information from the scantest cues, but the more cues they get about the user, the more likely they are to engage in communication with them (Heisler and Crabill, 2006; Jacobson, 1999; Jacobson, 1996).

Du Bois seems to claim that his approach is pioneering, in the sense that he has incorporated all types of stancetaking acts (such as epistemic stance, affective stance, evaluation and alignment), which before were considered separate varieties of stances, into one integrated scheme as various aspects, elements, or functions of a single stancetaking act (2007: 144-145). However, a fairly similar idea was introduced earlier by Berman et al. (2002) and Berman (2005), who presented a concept of stance best described by Ragnarsdóttir and Strömqvist (2005: 146), as ‘a three-place relational concept, involving the three canonic components of a communicative situation: *Sender*, *Recipient*, and *Text*’.

According to Berman et al. (2002: 258) and Berman (2005: 107), the relations among the three components of stance are expressed by *Orientation* – one of the three related dimensions of the notion of stance. In reference to *Orientation*, a discourse stance might be:

1. **Sender-oriented:** subjective, deictically centred on the speaker/writer, tends to be deontically judgemental or affective in attitude, and specific in reference; reflects personal involvement in the content of the text.
2. **Recipient-oriented:** communicatively motivated, addresses, or at least appears to be addressing, the hearer/reader directly, e.g. by expressions like *you know*.
3. **Text-oriented:** takes the object produced orally or in writing as a conceptual or cognitive point of reference, relates to the content of discourse in and of itself; might be couched in personal or more distanced terms.

The remaining two dimensions of stance, according to Berman (2005: 259-260) and Berman et al. (2002: 107-109), are *Attitude* and *Generality*, which are described the following way:

1. **Attitude** represents a relation between a cognising speaker/writer and a topic as a continuum from the more objective, abstract and universalistic epistemic attitudes via socio-culturally determined deontic attitudes, shared within a group familiar to the speaker/writer, to the most subjective reactions and personal feelings that an individual experiences in relation to a given topic:

- Epistemic attitude is expressed in terms of possibility, certainty or the evidence for the individual's belief that a given state of affairs is true (or false).
- Deontic attitude manifests itself as a judgemental, prescriptive or evaluative viewpoint in relation to the topic.
- Affective attitude concerns the speaker-writer's emotions (desire, anger, grief etc.) with respect to a given state of affairs.

2. **Generality** concerns how relatively general or specific a reference is to people, places and times mentioned in the text. This is closely dependent on the two other dimensions of stance; for example, speaker orientation tends to be quite specific. There are three levels of *Generality* expression:

- Personal (or specific), e.g. *I / my parents think*
- Generic, e.g. *People / We tend to think*
- Impersonal, e.g. *It's well known*

Du Bois and Berman et al. demonstrate generally related accounts of the concept of stance. Perhaps Du Bois' (2007: 158) account is more focused on the structure of stance and its interactive character, while Berman et al. (2002: 275-276) focus more on realisation of stance and the 'linguistic devices that are used to meet specific discourse functions'.

most relevant element to form the background for *Zuukie*'s reaction was the username, and the stance was taken in relation to the username.

Nyclatin38's response might seem related to the content of *Robshape*'s post, as it does address the request for 'help'. However, there might be some doubts as to whether the content of the post is *Nyclatin38*'s main concern. According to Schegloff's (1992: 196) instructions:

If one is concerned with understanding what something in interaction was for its participants, then we must establish what sense of context was relevant to those participants, and at the moment at which what we are trying to understand occurred.

According to Del-Teso-Craviotto's (2008: 255) observations, sexually explicit messages are not uncommon in this room, and are not typically rejected. It may then be concluded that in the given context *Nyclatin38*'s reaction to this specific post was provoked by the displayed identity of the poster and not the content of the post, and, again, that the username played an important role in constructing the context for *Nyclatin38*'s reaction.

Thus, looking through the lens of 'sequencing', in conversation above we can see two 'question – answer' sequences: 1-4 and 1-5. However, sequencing as the key organising factor of the interaction may not be sufficiently precise to accurately address the issues of relevance and orientation in conversation. When we observe what exactly was oriented to in the responses, we see that it was not simply a question-answer schema, but something that would more precisely be described as 'provocation-reaction', where the key 'triggering' factor was a username displaying an identity undesirable in the given place. Stance, by incorporating the notion of 'ownership', instead of focusing exclusively on what is said, enables the identity of the speakers to be incorporated as a meaningful element of the communication, not just as its product. This is important for the present study, as we can say that the key role in the manifestation and determination of the stance ownership in CMC is played by the username. Stance thus enables the usernames to depart from the role of static emblems to active components of the communication.

2.2.1.D. Stance in the present study

Research completed with the aid of the concept of stance has so far typically focused on constructing situational and social identities in reference to norms and ideologies or in opposition to other identities (e.g. Bucholtz, 2009; Coupland and Coupland, 2009; Jaffe, 2009a; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2009; Kiesling, 2009; McIntosh, 2009; Shoaps, 2009), or on differences in linguistic expression of certain stances between different linguocultural settings, genres, modalities or categories of persons (Ragnarsdóttir and Strömqvist, 2005; Ravid and Cahana-Amitay, 2005; Reilly, Zamora and McGivern, 2005; Tolchinsky and Rosado, 2005; Van Hell et al., 2005). These studies are mostly based on turn-by-turn analysis of interaction. Thus, in the centre of attention is a type of stance, an identity aspect, or another social phenomenon expressed by it, and not an individual. The identities presented from this viewpoint seem fragmentary and momentary.

Du Bois (2007: 173), by indicating that stance is always owned by or linked with a social actor, points out that a specific individual can also be a focus of a study based on interaction analysis. Constructing lasting identities of specific individuals over longer periods of time or numerous interactions does not disregard the interactive character of stance or the role of interaction co-participants. This can be demonstrated by the following examples.

Damari (2010) refers to the dialogic character of stance in her research on construction of durable identities by using the example of a binational couple, who enacted distinct identities referring to cultural differences. As she has demonstrated, the dialogicality of the stance does not have to be realised by references to the directly preceding utterances, or in a single interaction. Interlocutors may refer to stances taken in previous interactions and not necessarily limit their orientation to the current 'turn-by-turn' stance episode.

Another related feature of stance that Damari draws on in her study is intertextuality, which '[l]ike dialogicality, describes the engagement of a current speaker with a prior spoken or written text, the difference being that the prior text is generally understood to exist at some temporal distance from the current interaction' (2010:

612). Intertextuality of stance thus means that motifs may be transferred between the conversations for further evaluation.

The couple presented themselves and each other as certain types of people with lasting standpoints in relation to demographic categories of nationality and religion (Israeli, American, religious, secular) on the basis of their past stances. In her interview with the couple, Damari (2010: 615-625) observed the following stancetaking strategies linking the past and present stances:

- Responding to one's own prior stance (*I thought, before I met him*)
- Attributing stances to the partner (*You always say, He's always saying to me*)

Therefore, taking stances in interaction with the interviewer can in this case be considered a continuation of the ongoing construction of the couple's joint and individual identities as well as their relationship – durable identities are constructed by continuous reflection on particular topics. Damari (2010) used the concept of stance to present an additional, longitudinal dimension in data from a single interaction. These strategies might also be present in the asynchronous CMC, which facilitates access to other discussions and enables previous posts to be cited.

A somewhat different approach to studying enduring identity of an individual is given by Johnstone (2009). By means of discourse analysis, complemented by interview and biographical records, she examines speeches and writings of Barbara Jordan (1936-1996), a prominent African-American politician, across her entire career. Johnstone observes how recurrent patterns of stancetaking across different genres and contexts, combined with elements of 'metastance' on the choice to adopt a carefully selected speaker stance across different contexts, sum up as a consistent, recognisable style associated with a particular individual. Based on a specific ideology of personhood and language (that, in short, linguistic consistency, based on truth and correctness, indicates personal and moral credibility), Jordan constructs her stable and lasting political identity of moral authority in combination with her unique rhetorical manner.

According to Johnstone (2009: 33), 'In certain language ideological contexts, stylistic differentiation can be semiotically linked with particular speakers, such that individuals claim to recognize other individuals on the strength of their characteristic ways of using language, and some individuals' linguistic styles may come to be named and emulated.' She shows how linguistic style might be designed by repeated stancetaking strategies, and that styles, apart from being associated with interactional situations or social identities, can be associated with individual speakers.

Although Jordan's style derived from specific discursive resources, such as the traditional preaching style of African-American churches or training in legal and political debate and oratory, she developed a unique style linked to her personal identity of Barbara Jordan, a thoughtful and authoritative person with a unique life history, rather than to separate social identities, such as being black, a female, an attorney or a politician. (Some of these aspects, such as race, gender or region of upbringing – according to Johnstone, 2009: 46 – may have disadvantaged her, if they had been separated.) This unique style was maintained throughout her entire career and across all genres in both spontaneous and carefully planned speeches as expression of consistent self – in opposition to strategic adaptations of flexible social identities to specific situations and audiences. Repeatedly hearing her speeches made the audience recognise her style as consistent and unique. In CMC identity is constructed mainly linguistically, so we can expect that developing a specific, recognisable style might be an important strategy in constructing continuity of identity.

Johnstone (2009) has also shown that stance, apart from its content, interlocutors or types of social identities may also be oriented to the nature of identity and its relationship with the discourse through which it is enacted. As she puts it: 'In using a consistent style of stance across time and situation, Jordan was not so much aligning herself with or against styles or associated social identities, as positioning herself outside of the need for such alignments and disalignments' (Johnstone, 2009: 47).

These two examples illustrate different strategies of constructing lasting identities through the notion of stance: Damari (2010) drawing on the dialogicality highlighted by Du Bois, and Johnstone (2009), focusing on linguistic tools of realisation of

stance, which evokes Berman's attention to the variability of the expression of stance. In my case study, to observe the process of constructing identity in relation to the selected username, I am going to incorporate the ideas from these two examples and draw on the concepts of intertextuality and repetitiveness as strategies to construct the impression of stable, durable and coherent identity. In the selected conversations I will be looking for stances taken in orientation to the semantics of the selected usernames to demonstrate its relevance for the communication.

3. Summary

To observe whether or not semantics of usernames matter after the first-impression effect, we have to present how they are used in subsequent encounters by competent speakers. So far, it has been demonstrated that the way names are used might fulfil various social actions in interaction, but there is hardly any evidence on the role of semantics of names in the interaction, especially how semantically transparent anthroponyms contribute to ongoing construction of the identities of their bearers.

To do this, I am going to present a case study as an example of what type of evidence would be required to address this issue. I am going to select a username and analyse conversations between this particular user and other participants who interact with this user repeatedly. To ensure reliability, the conversations have been collected from a wide range of topics and over a long period of time. This will show whether or not the username continued playing a role in constructing the identity of the named.

The analysis will be performed on naturally occurring data, not affected by the researcher in any way. I am going to use CA, another ethnomethodological method, next to MCA. In order to address concerns about applying ethnomethodological methods to researching identity, I am going to complement these methods with the concept of stance as a lens for analysing the material.

4. The case study

In unit II, I have demonstrated that usernames may work as terms of categorisation by invoking sets of attributes associated with the specific term selected as a

username. However, as was explained, to demonstrate the role of usernames in constructing identities of the named users it is not enough to list what attributes are associated with certain username; it has to be shown that they are activated in the interaction. To do this, I will analyse excerpts of the forum conversations where the identity construction of the selected user can be related to their username. To demonstrate that this relation is ongoing and not limited to the first impression, I am going to follow the selected individual across a variety of discussions and over a certain period of time.

In a wider perspective, conversation analysis can also serve as evidence regarding the meaning of names. To reiterate, the evidence should address two points, namely, that a name has a lasting effect on the identity of the named, and that competent speakers have to understand the name to use it correctly. Then it can be argued that the name has meaning.

The forum *Posidelki* encourages the construction of durable, recognisable identities. First, participation is only enabled upon registration, which enforces membership. This also means that, although technically it is possible to create multiple profiles, it is impossible to re-enter the forum with a new username without registration. Additionally, the information about who has changed their username is available to fellow participants through a request made in a special section of the forum. Moreover, continuous participation is rewarded, e.g. by status upgrades or medals. A forum, as an asynchronous variety of CMC, where the communication is stored and can be revisited, enables participants to maintain continuity of communication by referring to previous utterances, quoting them as well as transferring motifs from one discussion to another.

In *Posidelki*, the discussions are typically of a multi-party character amongst some three-six participants, of various length and duration; some may contain a dialogue or several dialogues. Although the interactions that I have observed perhaps do not strictly fit the turn-taking pattern of oral conversation (e.g. a single post may respond to more than one preceding post), they clearly have a turn-taking character, are easy to follow, and normally have no logic disruptions (apart from deliberate actions that are easy to spot). The name of the forum – *Posidelki*, ‘gatherings’ – frames the

communication as an informal chat. Overall, the collected data can be considered as an online informal ‘conversation’.

I should perhaps reiterate here that the idea of identity pursued in this work is that of a product of interaction. In relation to this, two aspects in my understanding of **virtual identity** may need clarification. Firstly, my focus is solely on the identity that is being constructed in CMC; I do not inquire into its correspondence with the offline identity or treat the latter as a reference point for an ‘authenticity check’. For example, if someone performs a male identity in the analysed conversations (e.g. by using grammatically masculine forms), I am going to refer to this user as male irrespective of his offline gender or genders. Second, I do not assess identities constructed offline as more (or less) ‘real’ in relation to the ones constructed online. Assessing some identity as ‘truer’ than other indicates an essentialist approach that is not in line with the theoretical framework of this study. Whereas an identity performance may be found by interlocutors to be unconvincing and in this sense the identity deemed inauthentic, which is not limited to CMC, the identity itself is always constructed, whether offline or online. If we describe virtual identity as ‘unstable, performed and fluid’, then, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 245) put it, ‘*all* identities are “virtual”’, as any identity can be characterised in this way.

4.1. *Chainik*

The username selected for the case study is *Chainik*. I have selected the individual to be studied by the following criteria: the user is a generous contributor, is not an administrator or moderator, and has a semantically transparent username. The data consists of conversations that took place between 19/06/2009 and 15/07/2013, in which the selected individual participated or was referred to by others. Having contributed over 5000 posts, *Chainik* is one of the most active participants on the forum *Posidelki*, which is reflected by his ‘status’, marked on his profile as ‘elite’ – the status granted to the particularly active participants. *Chainik* is not a member of the forum’s administration. The username that he has selected derives from a commonly used Russian word *чайник* ‘teapot; kettle’. This term has also a secondary, colloquial meaning, namely, ‘incompetent, inexperienced person, hardly

knowing their topic, and in general a stupid, unintelligent person' (Ozhegov and Shvedova, 1999: 877). Thus, we can say that there exists a membership category of *чайники* [chainiki] 'teapots; dummies' that has a set of commonly recognised associated features such as lack of knowledge and experience, or low intelligence. In *Posidelki*, the username *Chainik* also seems to function as a term of categorisation and is taken as an indication that the thus-named user belongs to the category of *чайники*. This is, for example, observable when *Chainik* is included in this category by being referred to by the noun *чайник* in its generic function. This is done by both himself (e.g. *умеют ли чайники думать*, 'are chainiks⁹² able to think'; *разве чайник может знать русский алфавит*, 'can (a) chainik be familiar with a Russian alphabet') and his interlocutors (e.g. *чайники конечно обслуживаются вне очереди*, 'chainiks are obviously served out of turn'; *чайников бояться - в столовую не ходить*, 'if you fear chainiks – don't go to dining-room').

The term *чайник* has also been transferred from everyday communication to Russian CMC to denote an unskilled computer and Internet user. This usage of the term *чайник* requires a more detailed account so that it is not confused with *ламер*, 'lamer', another appellation for an incompetent user. Lutovinova (2009, 2008), who discusses in detail 'linguo-cultural types of persons in CMC', provides an extensive comparison of the categories *чайник* and *ламер*. Her study is based on various types of data related to CMC: dictionaries and encyclopaedias, the Russian National Corpus, collections of proverbs, phrases, aphorisms and anecdotes, texts of contemporary poetry and prose related to virtual reality and CMC, posts from forums and chatrooms, emails, Internet diaries, personal websites and home pages, websites of multiuser role-playing games, archives of instant messages, SMS texts, surveys and interviews (Lutovinova, 2009: 9).

On *RuNet*, two terms denote an unskilled computer user: *ламер* and *чайник*. But their characteristics differ: *ламер* would not admit their lack of knowledge and

⁹² I will be using the original forms, namely, *Chainik* for a username, and *чайник* [chainik] (sing.) and *чайники* [chainiki] (pl.) for a common noun in my own narrative. In the translation of users' communication, I will be using the anglicised version chainik (sing.) and chainiks (pl.) as it is not always clear in what capacity the word is being used (as a name or as a noun) or what translation to apply.

presents themselves as a professional, while *чайник* is aware of their incompetence and is willing to learn. *Чайник* is commonly conceptualised as an average person of any gender or age who is not familiar with computers but is enthusiastic about learning. *Чайник* learns simple operations from instruction books but prefers explanations made in person, and therefore asks many questions. At times, overwhelmed with the amount of information absorbed, *чайник* is unable to use it properly. *Чайник* does not use or understand Internet slang. While *чайник* lacks knowledge of IT, they might be a good professional in their own area. *Чайник* is generally perceived as curious but naïve, which generates positive reactions, although more experienced computer users who are constantly asked trivial questions may find it annoying and occasionally get tempted to tease them. In essence, however, they are keen to help, as *чайник* is perceived as being at a stage in knowledge acquisition that every skilled user has been through (Lutovinova, 2009: 352-358; 2008: 60).

In contrast, *ламер* functions as an offensive appellation. *Ламер* is ‘a *чайник* who thinks he is a hacker’, tries to look and behave like a hacker, and enjoys the company of *чайник* who would not discover or disclose his masquerade. *Ламер* uses computer slang a lot, often incorrectly, and never uses such expressions as ‘I don’t know’, ‘I can’t’, or ‘I’m unable’. All of Lutovinova’s (2009: 359-360) informants stated that *ламер* is always male (typically up to 25-26 years of age); a woman can only be a *чайник* as women are never convinced about their IT skills and do not hesitate to admit their incompetence. *Ламер* knows very little and is unable to progress because of his tendency to overrate his own knowledge and because of his sense of superiority over others. He blames others or circumstances for his failures and never notices his own errors. *Ламер* in general engenders negative attitudes. If he fails, he is not worth helping and the best strategy to deal with him is to laugh at him (Lutovinova, 2009: 359-365). Thus, although both *чайник* and *ламер* are characterised by incompetence in IT, they are ascribed sets of other qualities that make them two different categories of persons.

In the forum, the username *Chainik* may therefore be associated by the audience with a person who is unintelligent in general, who is ignorant in some field, or is ignorant

in the field of IT specifically. Its primary meaning may also be evoked, especially that the gatherings may associate with drinking tea. The analysis of conversations will reveal how the term is handled locally, in *Posidelki*.

4.2. Doing ‘being a *Chainik*’

As construction of a consistent identity involves repetition and accumulation of certain types of stances, we will be observing construction of *Chainik*’s identity through series of stances taken by both himself and his interlocutors during interactions. This is just as in Sacks’s (1984b: 414) explanations that ‘doing “being ordinary”’ is similar to what a person does as a job, namely, to performing activities that are required for the job to be done (see p. 206). In this section, I will present examples of how *Chainik* himself as well as his interlocutors co-construct his identity as consistent and recognisable. I will also demonstrate that both *Chainik* and other participants of the forum perceive his identity as connected with his username and constructed in relation to it.

The first stancetaking action in building up a recognisable identity in *Posidelki* is not, however, taken in direct interaction; it is the registration that includes a decision of what username to choose and what information to display in the personal profile. A username will serve as a term of reference and address as well as, potentially, a source of characteristics ascribed to the user. A profile provides additional linguistic and non-linguistic cues in the form of pictures, slogans and selected personal information. *Chainik* has chosen not to reveal any personal information (such as name, age and location) on his profile; therefore, his profile contains only the user statistics automatically displayed on every profile. *Chainik*’s avatar represents a character and a quote from a series about ‘gastarbeiters’ in Russia, *Haua Paua* [nasha rasha] (Image 1).



Image 1. *Chainik*'s profile.

Chainik stresses the link between his username and his identity from the beginning of his use of the forum. Image 2 presents his introductory post.

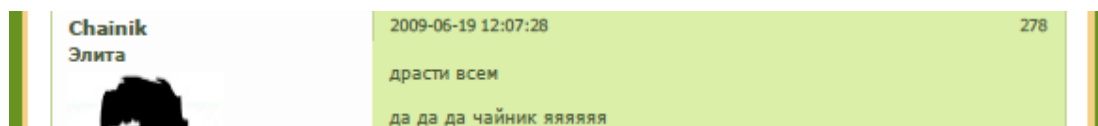


Image 2. morning all / yes yes yes the teapot is me me me me me.

His username immediately attracts attention. For example, *Malishka*'s question (Image 3) may suggest that she perceives his adoption of it as an act of self-categorisation rather than of pure self-reference. *Chainik* confirms by indicating that this might be a self-deprecating name. He constructs a Membership Categorisation Device (MCD, see p. 83) that contains a collection of hierarchically-organised categories, 'teapot' and 'samovar', so that 'samovar' is perceptibly superior. In this

way *Chainik* frames his username as an inference-rich term of categorisation (see p. 83) from the start.⁹³

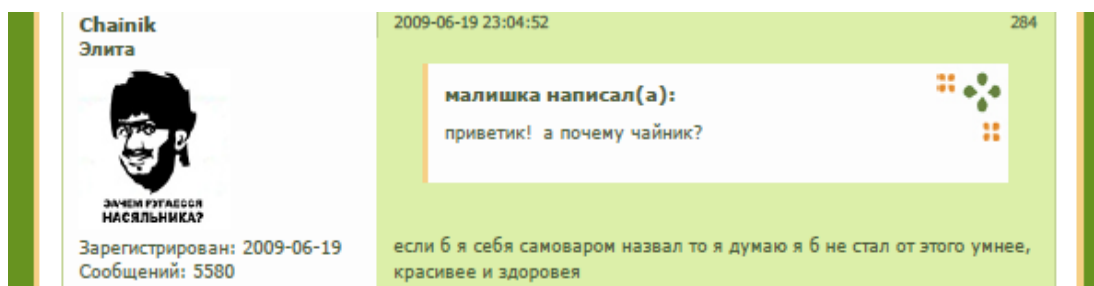


Image 3. {malishka wrote: / hi! and why chainik?} / if I called myself a samovar, I think I wouldn't make myself cleverer, / more beautiful or healthier.

We can observe how interaction is necessary for identity construction. *Malishka*'s uptake of *Chainik*'s self-introduction facilitates *Chainik*'s continuation of the self-presentation work and constitutes a context to his response, and to some extent determines its form. *Chainik*'s answer to the question may seem tricky and opaque in relation to his behaviour. It may be read as an opinion that what you are called does not determine who you are, but it also suggests that his username selection was a carefully measured act. His description of the process of selection refers to the biblical story about the creation of the world and presents his username as the perfect choice (Image 4).

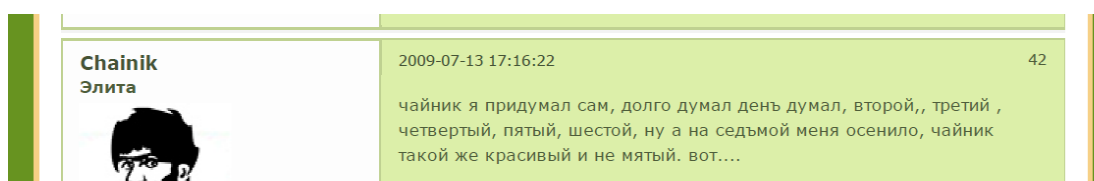


Image 4. I've come up with chainik myself, I was thinking for a whole day, then for a second, third, / fourth, fifth, sixth, and on the seventh day I was enlightened, teapot / is so beautiful and crease-resistant. so....

⁹³ It seems to be a shared idea that unequal values can be conveyed by comparing a teapot with a samovar (see also Images 39 and 82).

Chainik presents his identity as inseparable from his username. This stance towards his own identity can be found during a discussion entitled ‘What are you called at home?’, when he denies having any alternative identity at all (Images 5–6).

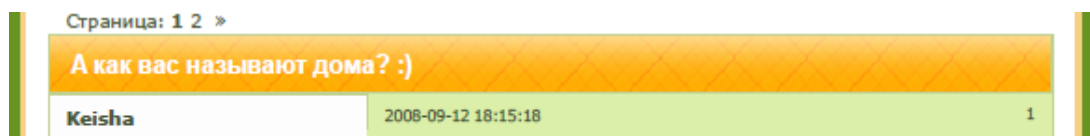


Image 5. What are you called at home? 😊

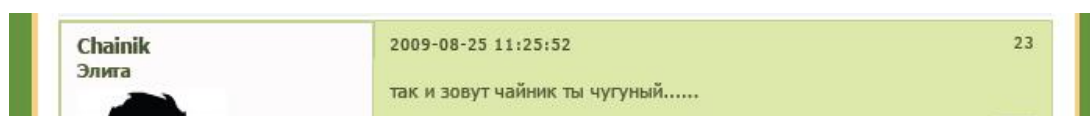


Image 6. that’s what they call me you cast iron kettle.....

Chainik denies the presupposition contained in the question that participants are addressed differently at home. *Chainik’s* response can be interpreted as an active rejection of the idea of having some other identity ‘at home’: he could have ignored this topic if he just had not wanted to reveal his offline identity, but he chose to respond. This stance was both accepted as valid (e.g. by *Chanel*) and rejected (or misunderstood) by *Krasavchik*, who reformulated the question (Images 7–8). These two different uptakes of *Chainik’s* stance demonstrate the dynamics of interaction. Interactivity of stance is expressed not just by alignment (positive or negative), but also by all types of transformations: ‘Advice ... can be ignored, sources of authority contested, jokes taken as insults, and so forth’ (Jaffe, 2009b: 8–9).

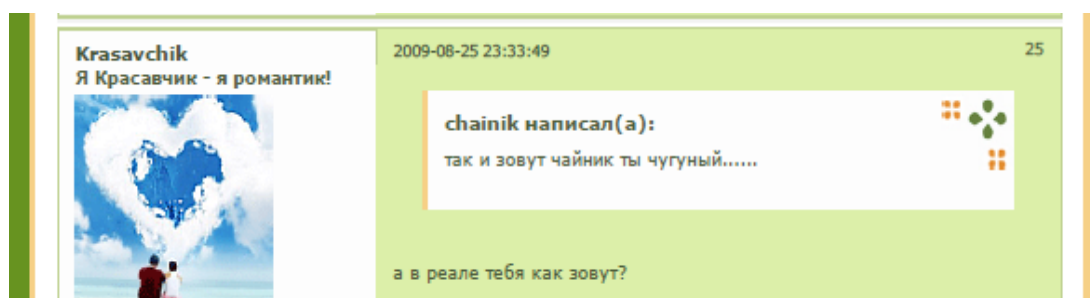


Image 7. {chainik wrote: / that’s what they call me you cast iron kettle.....} / and what are you called in real life?

Krasavchik displays a concern that *Chainik* misunderstood the question (as *Chainik* chose a dispreferred answer) and offers repair⁹⁴ by repeating and rephrasing it (Image 7). *Chanel*, on the other hand, plays along (Image 8).

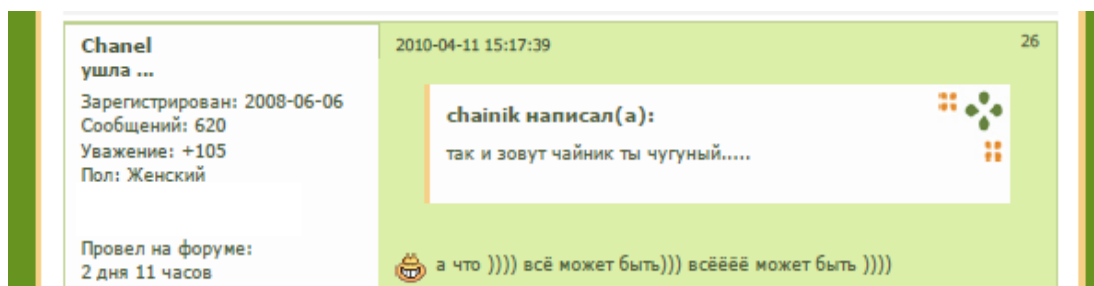


Image 8. {**chainik wrote:** / that’s what they call me you cast iron kettle.....} / why not 😊 anything is possible 😊 aaaaanything is possible 😊

Other participants also notice the relationship between *Chainik*’s username and identity. Some comments explicitly make the link between his username (or category membership) and performance accountable (i.e. perceptibly connected, recognisable, intelligible; see pp. 76-77) (Images 9–10).

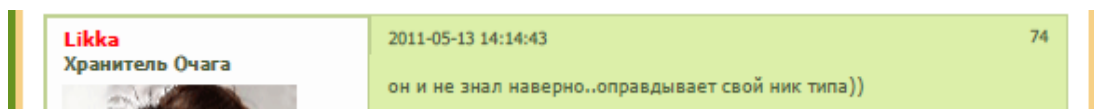


Image 9. he probably just didn’t know..he’s kinda justifying his nick 😊

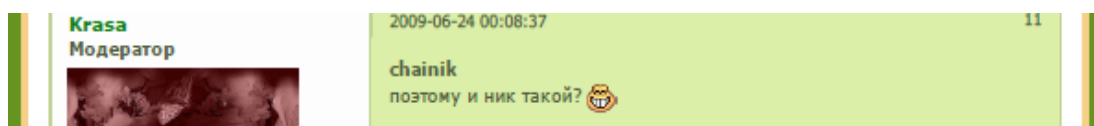


Image 10. **chainik** / is this why you have such a nick?

Thus, both *Chainik* and his interlocutors co-construct a connection between his username and identity.

⁹⁴ 'Repair' is a mechanism used to deal with errors in communication, including problems with hearing or understanding (Sacks, et al., 1974: 723–724).

4.2.1. Chainik's identity and the semantics of his username

4.2.1.A. References to the primary meanings

In its primary sense, *чайник* stands for 'teapot' (to brew and serve tea) and 'kettle' (to boil water). *Chainik* repeatedly presents himself as a 'teapot' and 'kettle' by referring to their characteristics and invoking activities related to using them. At the same time, he anthropomorphises these inanimate objects when he presents himself as if he were a teapot or a kettle, and describes the actions as though performed by a teapot or kettle: e.g. *осерчал чайник* ('chainik got furious': Image 11).

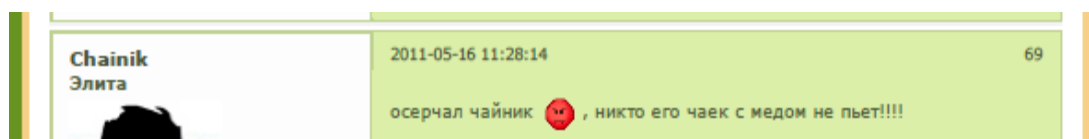


Image 11. chainik got furious, nobody drinks his tea with honey!!!!

Chainik's particularly productive stance-taking strategy to express epistemic stances (see p. 215-216 for types of stances) refers to boiling as a representation of the process of understanding something (Images 12–13).

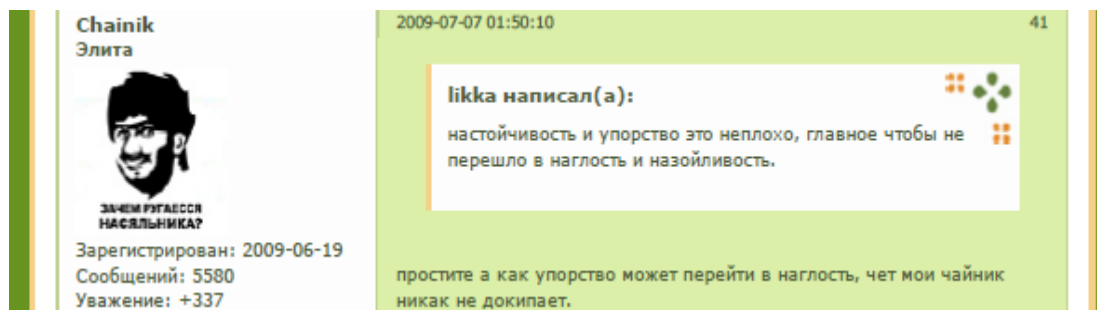


Image 12. {...} / sorry but how can persistence turn into impertinence, my kettle / just won't boil.

Here (Image 12) boiling is used to express an epistemic stance (doubt) but may also be understood as the expression of a deontic stance (criticism, judging somebody's opinion as illogical, or attacking their ability to express their thoughts clearly).

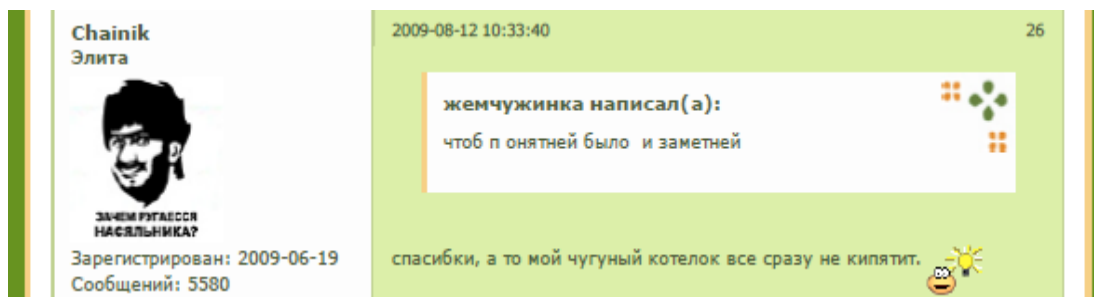


Image 13. {zhemchuzhinka wrote: / to make it clearer and more understandable} / thanks, as my iron kettle never boils instantly.

Here (Image 13) *Chainik* points out his own inability to understand certain issues. *Chainik* also exploits the semantics of his username to formulate other meanings: requests, complaints and other (Images 14–16).

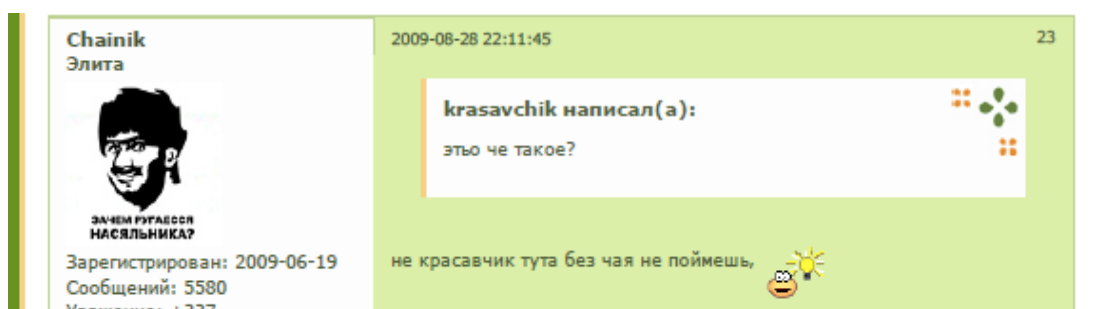


Image 14. {krasavchik wrote: / what’s that?} / no way krasavchik you won’t get it without tea

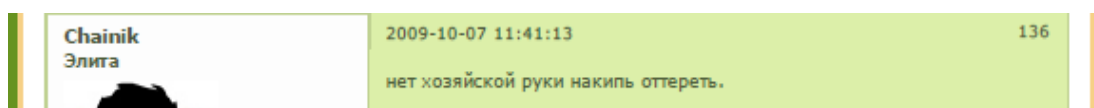


Image 15. No caring hand to remove limescale.

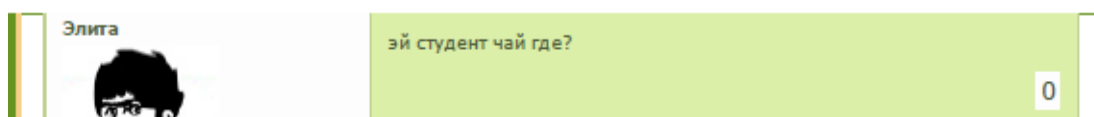


Image 16. hey, student, where’s the tea?

Other participants also comment on *Chainik*’s behaviour by referring to attributes of ‘teapots’ and ‘kettles’, the purpose and process of their use and other activities

associated with them, such as drinking tea. In this way, his identity is linked with his username and the username is established as a term of categorisation that defines his attributes. For example, in response to the heading ‘Your favourite beverage’ (Image 17), fondness for tea is established as an attribute linked to the category *чайник* [chainik].



Image 17. {**chainik wrote:** / tea, lots of tea} / **what other answer could (a) chainik possibly give?**

The link between *Chainik's* identity and his username is often made accountable by joking. Images 18–28 show how this activity facilitates a playful form of communication.

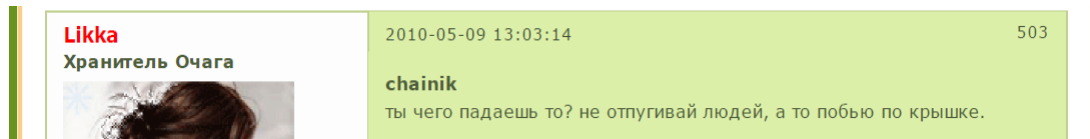


Image 18. **chainik** / don't scare the people away, or I'll hit you on the lid.

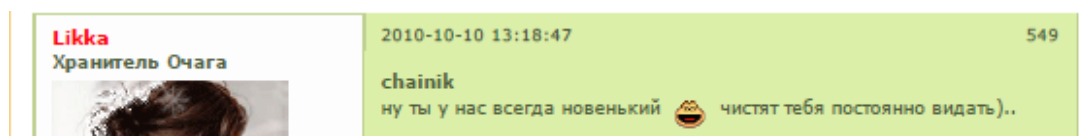


Image 19. **chainik** / you're always new apparently you get polished constantly 😊..

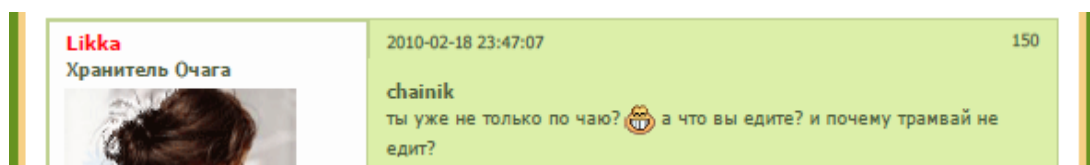


Image 20. **chainik** / you've not only had tea, have you? (...)

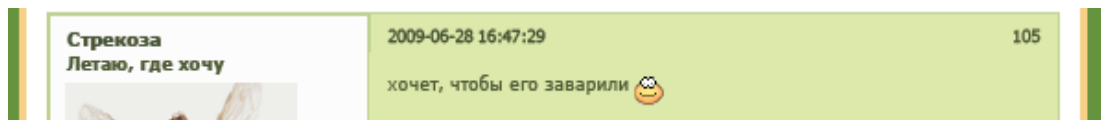


Image 21. wants to get boiled

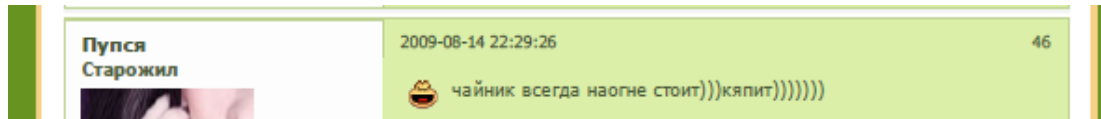


Image 22. chainik always on fire 😊 boils 😊

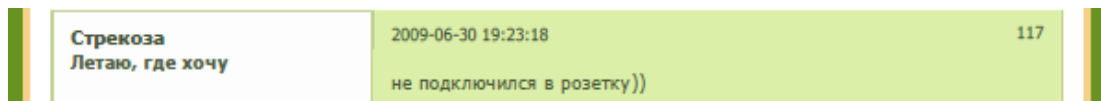


Image 23. he forgot to plug in 😊

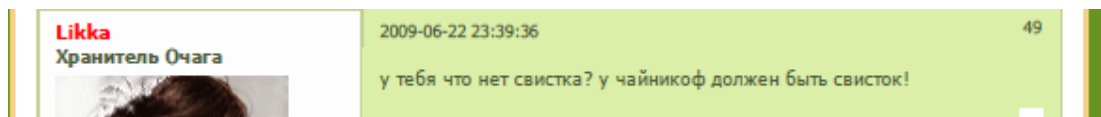


Image 24. don't you have a whistle? chainiks should have whistles!

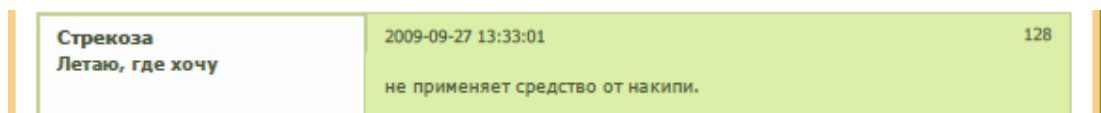


Image 25. he doesn't use descaler.

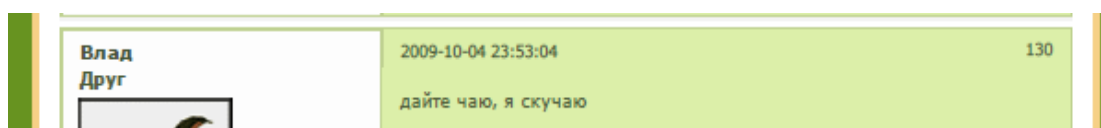


Image 26. give me tea, I'm bored⁹⁵

The posts in Images 26 and 27 may suggest that *Chainik* is particularly entertaining and conversations are less interesting when he does not participate. Provision of

⁹⁵ In Russian it rhymes: [daite chaiu, ia skuchaiu].

entertainment is thus also linked with the category ‘chainik’. *Chainik* also engages in establishing this link (Image 28).

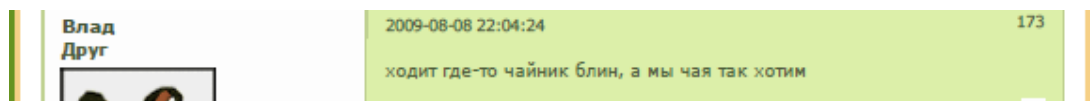


Image 27. chainik is wandering god knows where, while we want our tea so much⁹⁶

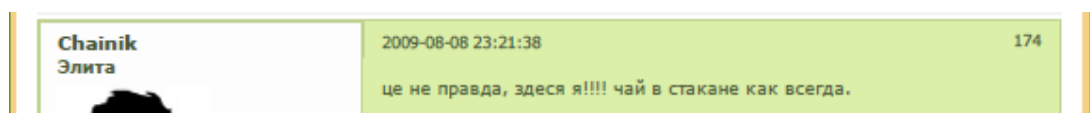


Image 28. it's not true, I'm right here!!!! The tea's ready in the mug as always.⁹⁷

References to the semantics of *Chainik*'s username, by him and his interlocutors, make the link between his username and identity accountable, and establishes him as member of the category ‘chainiki’. These references are not limited to occasional random comments and puns. Certain aspects of *Chainik*'s identity are recurrently enacted in reference to his username, working as a reference point to construct their recognisability and consistency. For example, *Chainik* repeatedly references the forum on behalf of the whole community to newcomers. In this way, he demonstrates that he is familiar enough with the forum and the participants to be able to present them to the audience competently, and claims the right to represent the forum. He also articulates questions and comments on the newcomers and instructs them (Images 29–35).

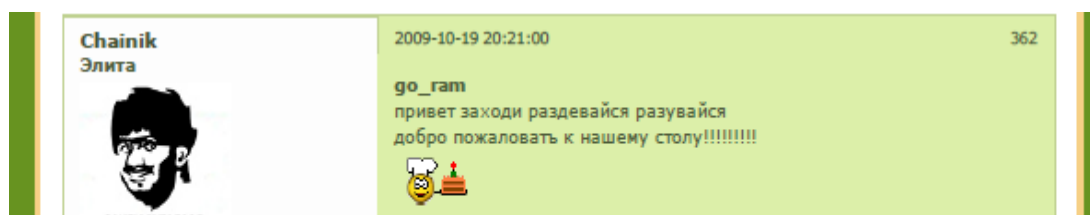


Image 29. go_ram / hello come in take off your coat and your shoes / welcome to our table!

⁹⁶ As above: [khodit gde-to chainik blin, a my chaia tak khotim].

⁹⁷ As above: [tse ne pravda, zdesia ia, chai v stakane kak vseгда].

Chainik positions himself in the role of the head of the household. He welcomes the newcomer the way a host would normally welcome visitors offline (Image 29). He uses an emoticon to present the familiar atmosphere of the forum.

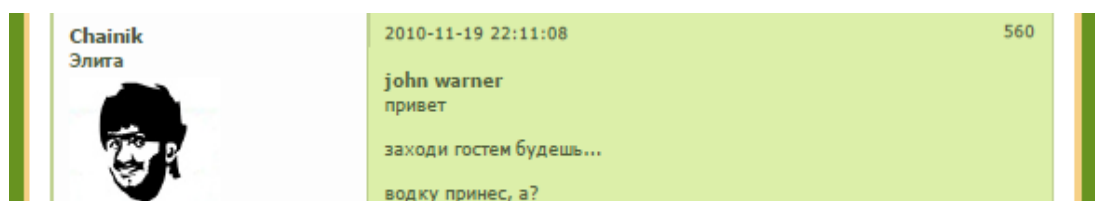


Image 30. **john warner** / hello / come in be our guest... / have you brought vodka, eh?

By a humorous, jovial invitation (Image 30), *Chainik* presents the casual character of the forum and offers to begin a relationship through his instant familiarity. He makes an independent decision to change the presented image of *Posidelki* from a tea-drinking event to a vodka-drinking one. At times, *Chainik* conceptualises the forum as a ‘country’ (*страна*) by renaming it *Posidelkino*, which is reminiscent of a toponym, and speaks on behalf of its ‘citizens’ (‘our country’) (Images 31–32).

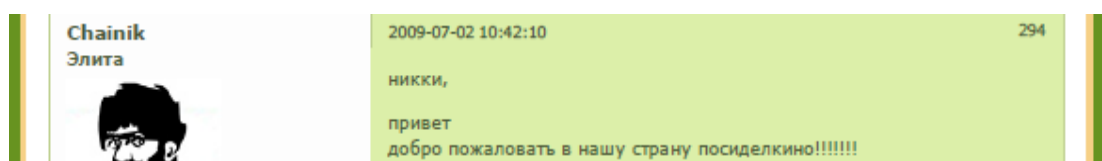


Image 31. **nikki**, / hello / welcome to our country posidelkiland!!!!!!!!

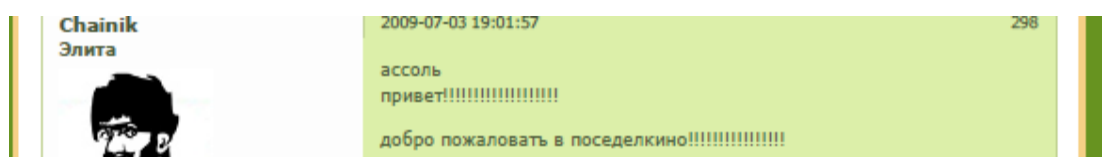


Image 32. **assol'** / hello!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! / welcome to posidelkiland!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Occasionally, *Chainik* addresses newly-registered users collectively (Image 33).

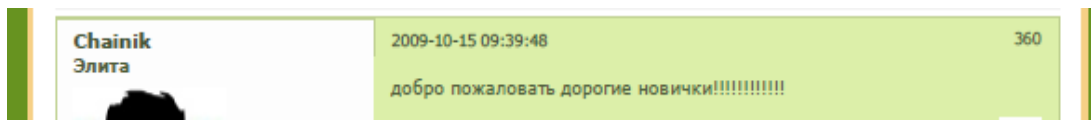


Image 33. welcome dear newcomers!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

On other occasions (Images 34–35), he offers evaluations of the participants of the forum ('simple', 'peaceful', 'hospitable'). In this way, he presents himself as knowledgeable and familiar within the community, which might further underline his role as a host or representative who is inviting a visitor into his house or institution ('please, take a look around', Image 35).

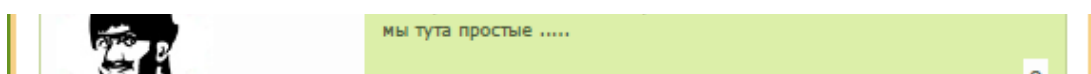


Image 34. we are simple here.....

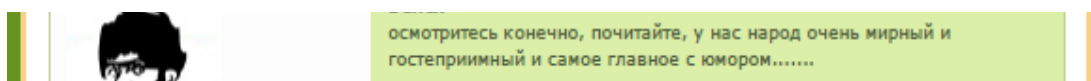


Image 35. please, take a look around, browse, our folks are very peaceful and hospitable and first of all have a sense of humour....

Chainik acts as a host of the forum and represents its community. He makes this activity accountable by constructing relational categories of 'regular participants' and 'newcomers'. By using the first person plural pronouns *мы*, 'we' and *наш*, 'our', he claims the status of a group insider. He offers evaluations of the forum and its participants by ascribing certain attributes to them (e.g. Images 34-35). He speaks with confidence, and presents a friendly and encouraging attitude towards the approached persons. He also invokes activities performed offline by visitors to somebody's house (taking off coat and shoes, sitting at a table, bringing vodka). In this way, he constructs his status on the forum and enhances his chance of being remembered, which may help him develop relationships. On the other hand, he often addresses newcomers as 'guests' or 'visitors' instead of as 'newcomers', as though to suggest that the newly-registered users are not yet 'new members' in the sense that a 'guest' or 'visitor' stays only for a short time and then leaves.

To act as a host of the forum, *Chainik* often uses the primary meaning of his username. As a teapot and a kettle are attributes of a host and requisites for ‘gatherings’, referring to them enhances the accountability of his performance (Images 36–45).

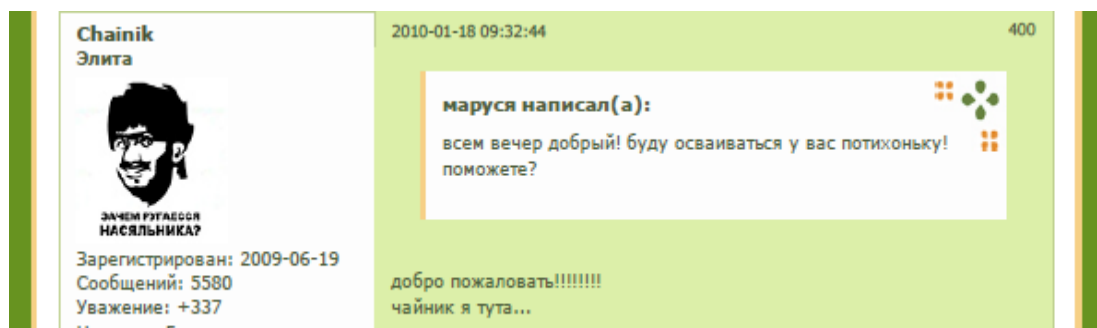


Image 36. {marusia wrote: / good evening to everyone! I’ll just be getting used to the place quietly! / will you help me?} / welcome!!!!!!!!!! / I’m (a) chainik here...

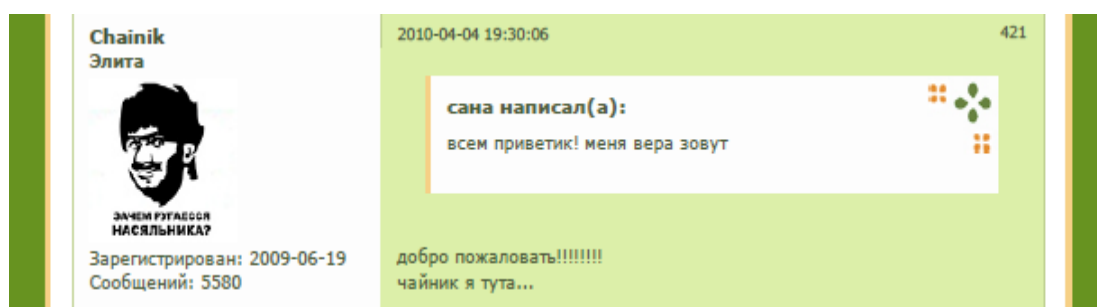


Image 37. {sana wrote: / hello everyone! my name’s vera} / welcome!!!!!!!!!! I’m (a) chainik here...

Chainik visibly formulates his posts as a self-categorisation rather than pure self-reference – indicating his location (‘here’) makes this self-presentation look like he is indicating a role, which blurs the boundary between a name and an inference-rich term of categorisation. A number of interlocutors respond with inquiries to establish category-bound attributes (Images 38–40).

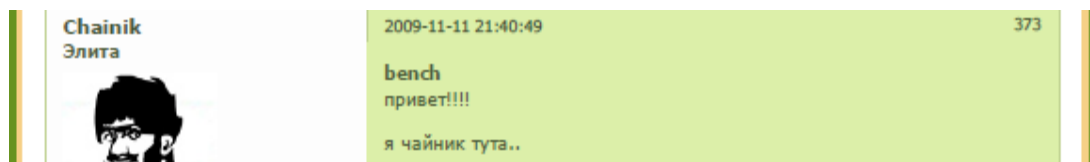


Image 38. **bench** / hi!!!! / I'm (a) chainik here...

For example, *Bench*'s uptake frames *Chainik*'s utterance as self-categorisation by asking him to specify his category-bound characteristics (Image 39).

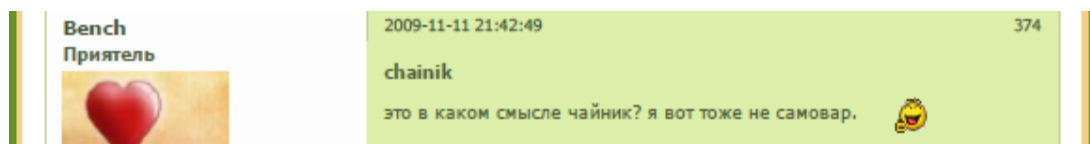


Image 39. **chainik** / it's chainik in what sense? I'm not exactly a samovar myself.

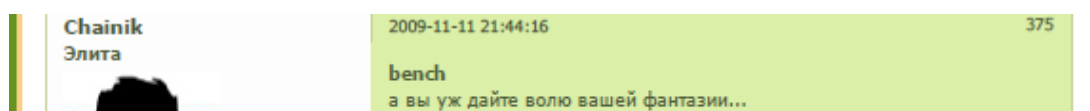


Image 40. **bench** / Please, feel free to give rein to your imagination on that...

Chainik does not provide a clear evaluation of his username, which may be read as an intention to refer to various elements of its semantics as the building blocks of his identity, and an invitation to play with associations and actively co-construct the meaning of *чайник*. On other occasions, *Chainik* explicitly refers to a teapot (Image 41).

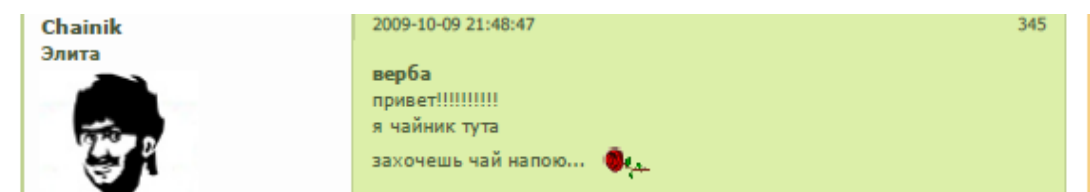


Image 41. **verba** / hello!!!!!!!!!! / I'm a teapot here / I'll serve tea if you want...

Offering tea is likely to be seen as an icebreaking activity enhancing a warm and cosy atmosphere. The invited participants (either newcomers or regulars) typically play along: they accept the offers, express gratitude, and enact tea-tasting and other related activities, occasionally making joking comments (Images 42–46).

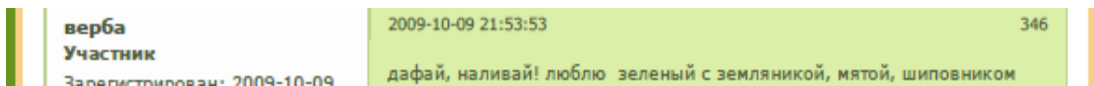


Image 42. go on, pour me some! I like green with strawberry, mint, rosehip

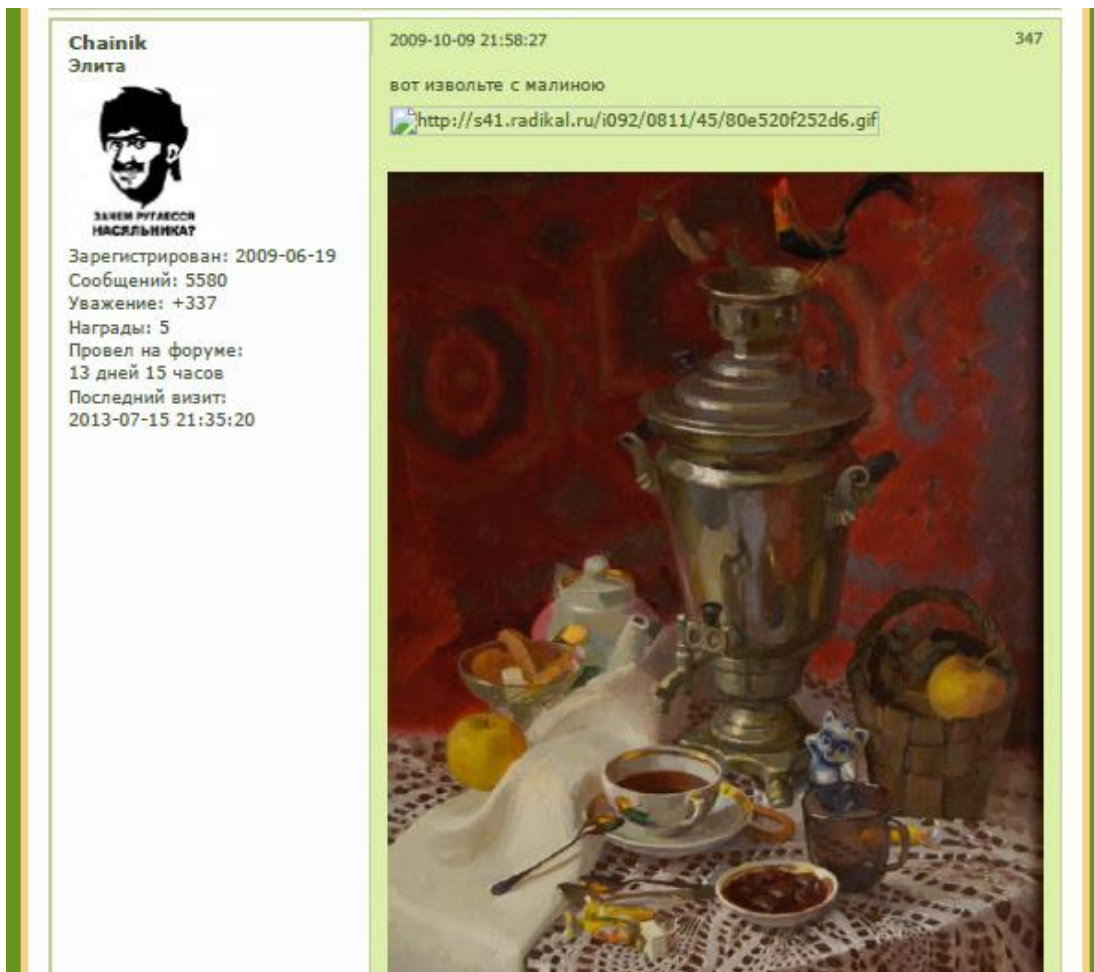


Image 43. Here you are, with raspberries

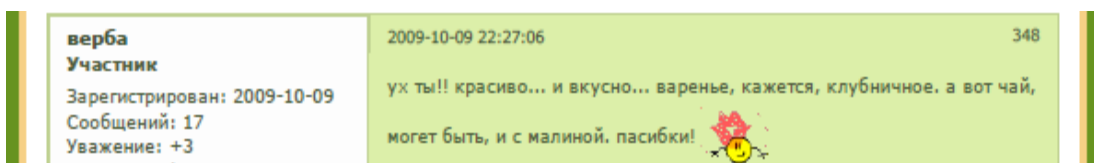


Image 44. ooh you!!! beautiful... and tasty...looks like strawberry preserve to me. While the tea / might be with raspberries. thanks!

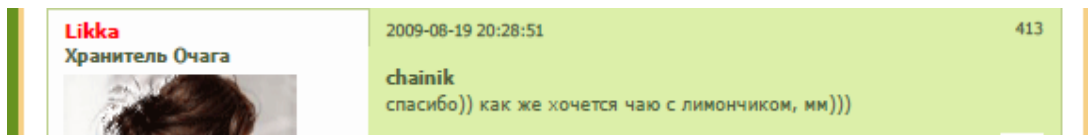


Image 45. **chainik** / thank you ☺ I'm just dying for some tea with lemon, mm ☺

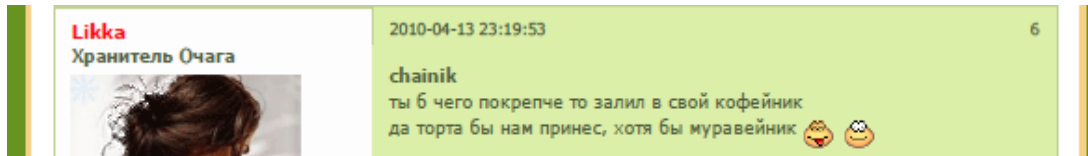


Image 46. **chainik** / why don't you pour something stronger in your coffee pot / and you could bring some cake, an anthill cake would do

In constructing *Chainik*'s identity in relation to the primary meaning of his username, both he and his interlocutors engage in the activity of categorisation. They invoke activities directly and indirectly linked with teapots or kettles (serving tea, boiling, whistling, welcoming guests, hitting 'on the lid') to establish his category-bound attributes. This is often performed through his routine of welcoming new members to the forum. *Chainik* uses the attributes as requisite for acting as a host of the forum, and thus negotiates his status as a central element of the 'gatherings'. In this way, he attracts attention, makes himself unmissable and memorable, and draws attention to the link between his username and identity.

4.2.1.B. References to secondary meanings

As explained before, a secondary meaning of *чайник* allows it to be used as an appellation for a category of people. It denotes an inexperienced computer user, a person lacking knowledge in some other field, or someone who is perceived as generally unintelligent. We can observe a number of strategies for utilising all these aspects of the semantics of *чайник* ('dummy') by *Chainik* to construct his identity. His interlocutors also repeatedly refer to, and explain his conduct by using his membership of a category of 'dummies'.

One of the senses of the secondary meaning of the term *чайник*, 'dummy', is that it functions as a term for a person who is incompetent regarding the matters related to

computers and the Internet. On a number of occasions, *Chainik*'s behaviour indicates a lack of knowledge about certain IT-related phenomena as well as a general technophobia. Sometimes he draws attention to this fact (which, in CMC, might be considered disadvantageous). Such is his contribution to the topic of Internet slang, in which he announces his incompetence (Image 47).

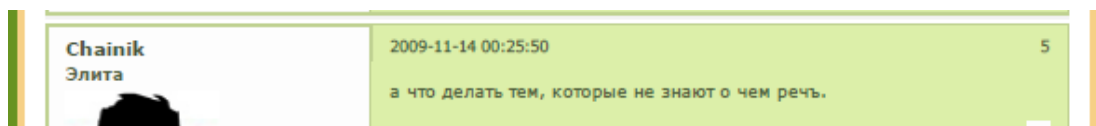


Image 47. and what about those, who don't know what you're talking about.

Chainik declares not just that he does not know Internet slang expressions, but that he does not know what 'Internet slang' is at all. Here, *Chainik* makes his self-categorisation as a 'dummy' accountable by enacting an aspect of IT illiteracy. This assertion might be considered an enacted pose: it is hardly believable that somebody who apparently uses the Internet on a regular basis does not know Internet-related expressions, or even how to find them on a search engine. Instead, he chooses to announce his illiteracy in Internet slang. On another occasion he enacts unfamiliarity with the specific expression *реал* [real], which means 'real world', 'outside of the Internet', 'offline' (Image 48).

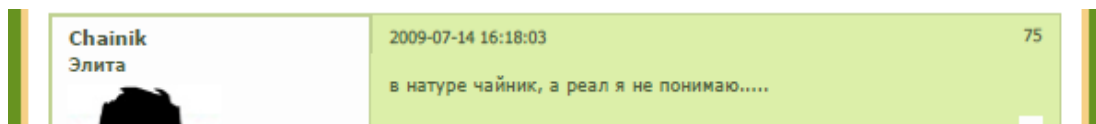


Image 48. I am (a) chainik by nature, and I don't understand the 'real' world

Again, it looks like he is deliberately drawing attention to his unfamiliarity with this expression (he manages to find a synonym), and his comment might be interpreted as a refusal to use it. Additionally, he presents his negative attitude in relation to mobile phones by using affective stances and irony (e.g., 'can't stand' and 'what have we come to', referring to nut-cracking and slicing bread with phones: see Images 49–51).

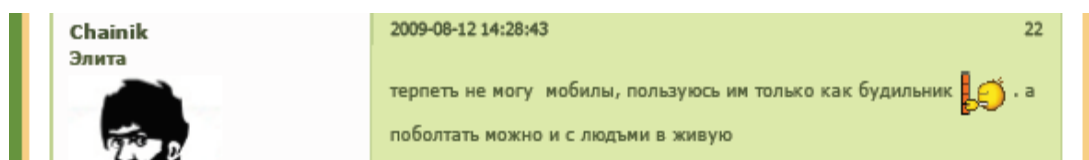


Image 49. can't stand mobiles, I use it only as an alarm clock / it's better to chat with people face-to-face

Chainik visibly considers that modern technology disturbs social relationships (Image 49). He justifies having a mobile phone himself by using it as an alarm clock (rather than to communicate). He manifests his attitude through a jocular redefinition of the purpose of mobile phones (Images 50–51). On the other hand, *Chainik* does not seem to practise what he preaches as he apparently enjoys his mediated communication on the forum: thus his stance towards technology might be perceived as a deliberate performance.

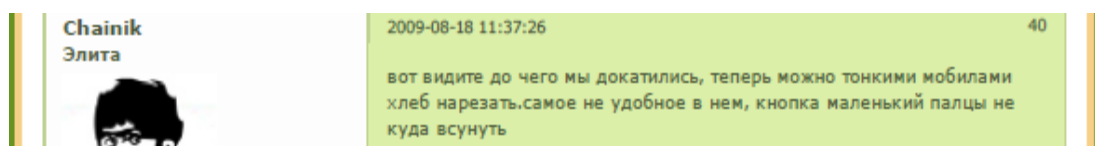


Image 50. see what we have come to, now you can slice bread with slim mobiles. the most inconvenient thing is that the button is so small there is nowhere to put your fingers

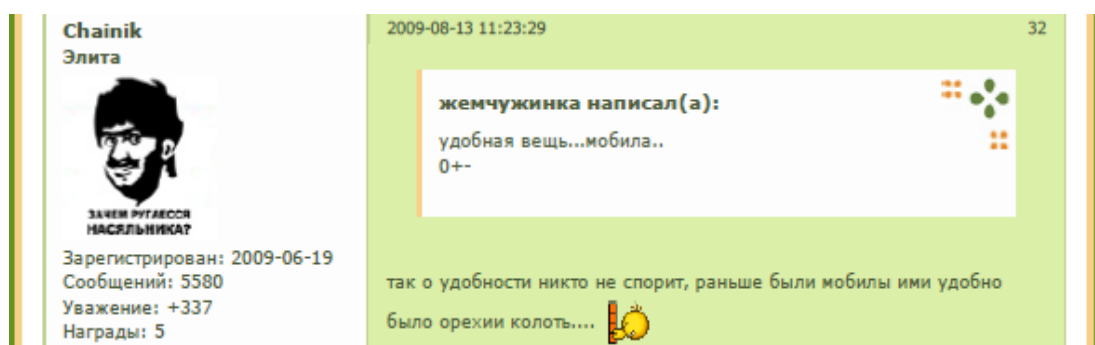


Image 51. {useful thing...a mobile..} / no one is arguing about usefulness, in the past mobiles were useful / for cracking nuts....

It should be noted here that, as Schegloff (2007a: 474) explains, to notice the link between ‘what someone has said or done and a categorization of the speaker by the

recipient or another participant’, it is not necessary for that link to be explicitly articulated. For example, although *Chainik* himself has not indicated the link directly, his performance of Internet illiteracy has been recognised as a category-bound attribute of an Internet ‘dummy’ and related to his username. This has found its expression in comments that explicitly point to the accountability of *Chainik*’s category membership, as well as in other reactions, that are often similar to those described by Lutovinova (2009) as typical reactions to those who are considered ‘dummies’ in terms of IT skills. These involve showing a friendly attitude and a willingness to help (Images 52–53), with incidents of teasing and joking (Images 62–65).

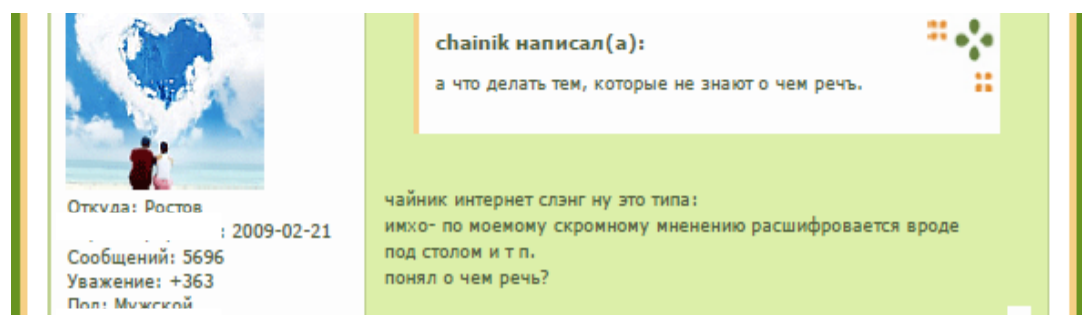


Image 52. {**chainik wrote:** / and what about those, who don’t know what you’re talking about} / **chainik internet slang is like:** / imho – in my humble opinion it is decoded kind of / under the table etc. / do you get it?

Krasavchik offers examples of Internet slang terminology to illustrate what Internet slang is. A particular illustration of the recognition of *Chainik*’s lack of knowledge in the field of IT comes from a topic specifically dedicated to his education (Images 53–61).

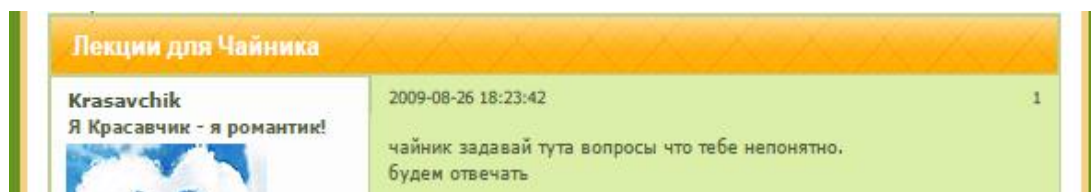


Image 53. **Classes for Chainik** / **chainik ask here about what you don’t understand.** / **we’ll answer**

Krasavchik launches this topic in response to *Chainik*'s announcement about his ignorance of Internet slang. In reference to shared norms, *Krasavchik* recognises that being a 'dummy' is undesirable, or merely a stage in acquiring IT knowledge. He assesses that the displayed category-bound characteristics related to lack of knowledge can and should be corrected, and offers a remedy in the form of classes. This project does not seem to be a joke, although it generates some humorous communication. Taking the position of a competent and knowledgeable educator, *Krasavchik* recreates *Chainik*'s position as a 'dummy'. *Chainik* does not show resistance; by expressing a willingness to learn and ask questions (Images 54–55) he aligns with *Krasavchik* and cooperates in constructing his identity as a 'dummy'.

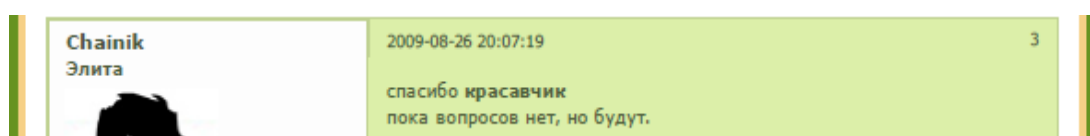


Image 54. thanks **krasavchik** / no questions right now, but there will be.

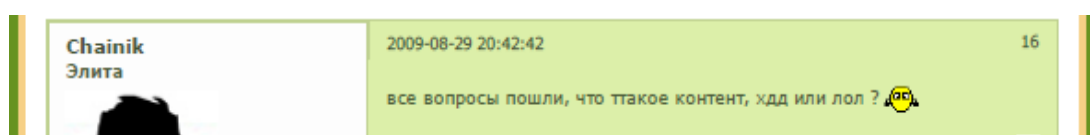


Image 55. here come the questions, what are the content, hdd or lol?

Not only does *Krasavchik* respond to *Chainik*'s query, but other participants also take this opportunity to demonstrate their expertise by defining commonly used expressions in CMC (Images 56–57). By positioning themselves in contrast to the ignorance acted out by *Chainik*, they reproduce *Chainik*'s position as a novice.

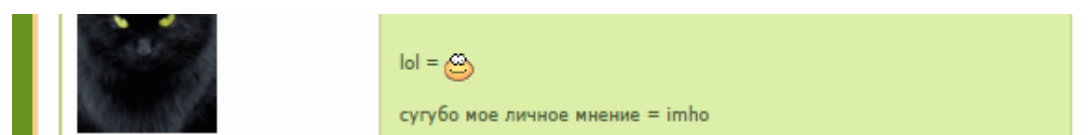


Image 56. lol = 😊 / in my humble opinion = imho

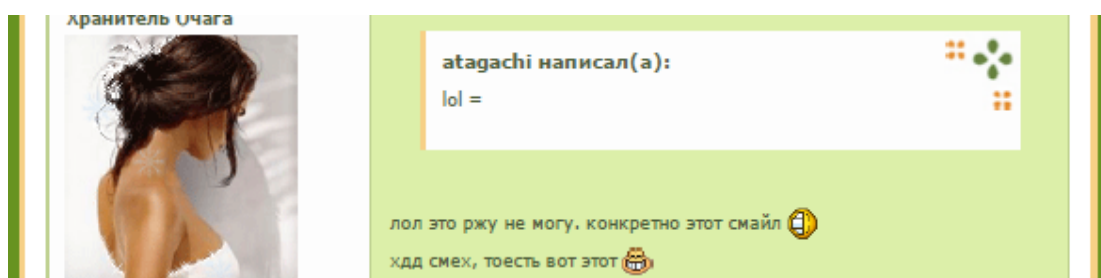


Image 57. {atagachi wrote: / lol = } / lol is laugh out loud, specifically this smile / hdd laughing, namely this one

Other examples of *Chainik*'s self-categorisation as a novice are when he addresses and refers to *Krasavchik* as his tutor (Images 58 and 60), and when he explicitly (although jokingly) defends *Krasavchik*'s competence when it is (also jokingly) challenged by *Krasa* (Image 59).

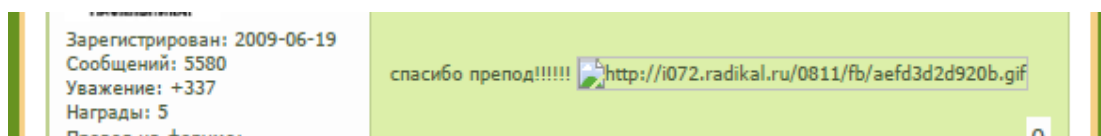


Image 58. thank you, tutor!!!!!!

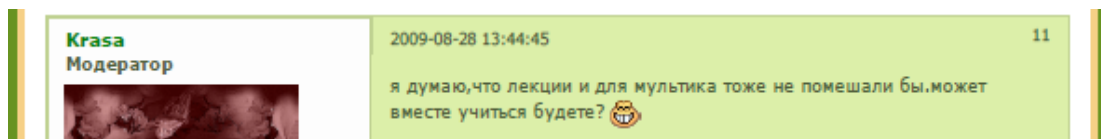


Image 59. I think, that classes for multik⁹⁸ also won't do any harm. perhaps / you'll study together?

Krasa jokingly questions *Krasavchik*'s knowledge (Image 59), and *Chainik* uptakes her stance by jokingly defending *Krasavchik*'s authority (Image 60).

⁹⁸ *Krasavchik*'s previous username

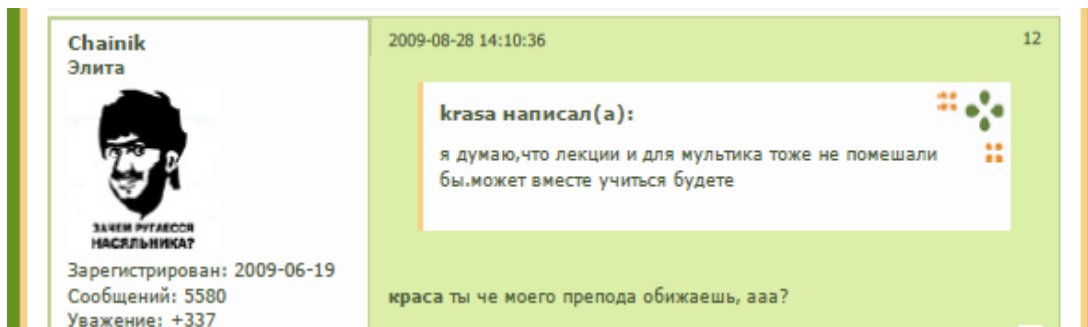


Image 60. {see Image 59} / krasa why are you offending my tutor, huh?



Image 61. (A picture).

Participants make contributions to this topic in the form of both articulated comments and pictures. Image 61 shows an example of a picture clearly reaffirming the accountability of *Chainik*'s category membership. Another example can be found in the exchange that starts when *Chanel* spots *Chainik*'s misspelling, possibly deliberate (due to the similar pronunciation), of the word *чего* ('what') as *чаво* (commonly used as an abbreviation of *часто задаваемые вопросы*, 'frequently asked questions', and thus the Russian equivalent of FAQ) (Images 62–65). *Chanel* shares her observation (Image 62):

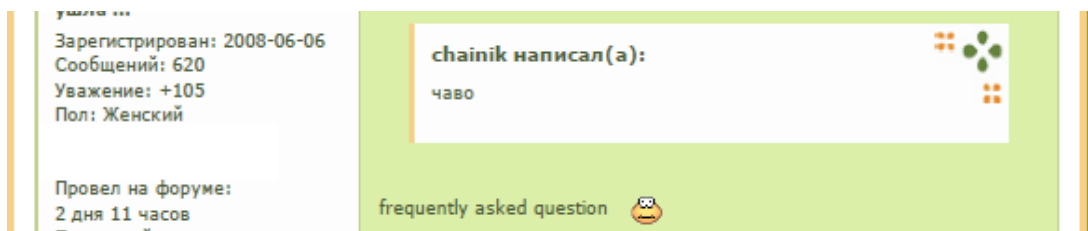


Image 62. {chainik wrote: / чаво} / frequently asked questions

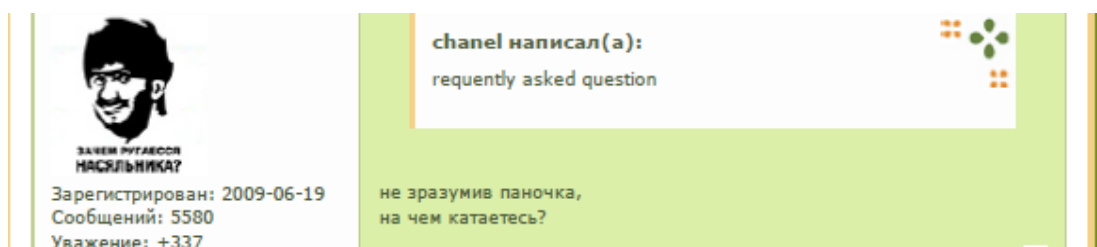


Image 63. {see Image 62} / I have not understood, lady, / what are you riding⁹⁹?

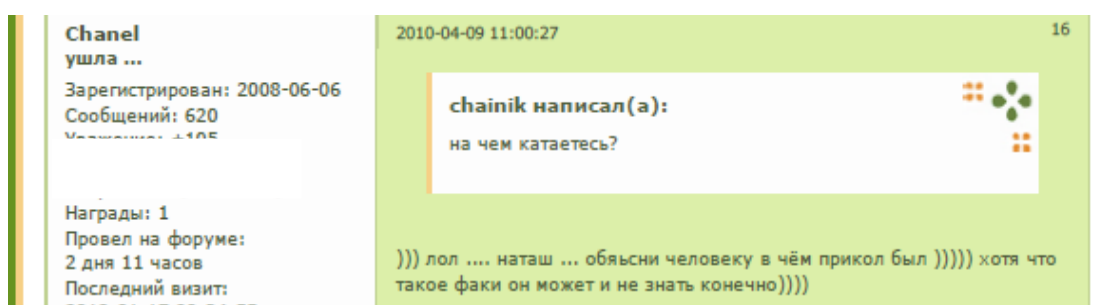


Image 64. {see Image 63} / 😊 lol natash ... explain to this fellow what was so hilarious 😊 although what / FAQ is he may actually not know 😊

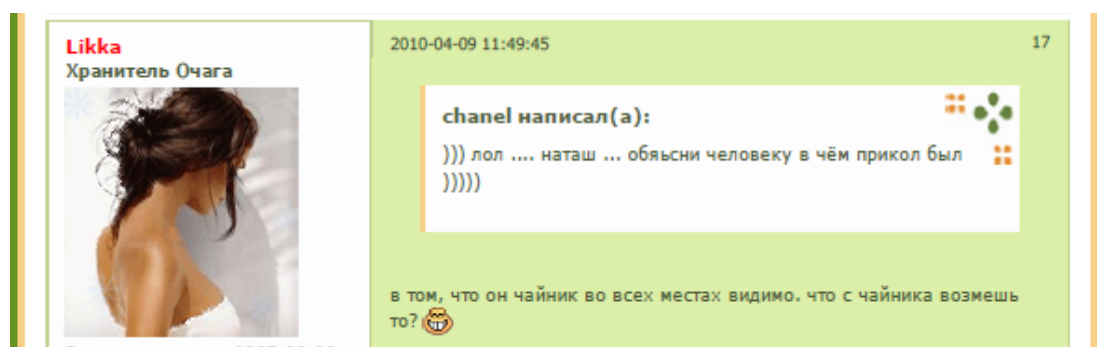


Image 65. {see Image 64} / in the fact, that he's apparently a chainik all over, what do you expect from (a) chainik?

Chainik states that he has not understood *Chanel*'s post (Image 63). *Chanel* laughs at *Chainik*'s confusion and turns to *Likka* to explain the humour of *Chainik*'s unintended wordplay. She makes his membership category accountable by asserting that his unfamiliarity with the expression *чаво* (FAQ) should have been expected of him (Image 64). *Likka* aligns with *Chanel* by explicitly linking *Chainik*'s category

⁹⁹ I.e. 'what are you referring to?' or 'what do you mean?'

membership with his incompetence in Internet terminology (Image 65). She takes for granted that *Chanel* shares her concept of *Chainik*'s category-bound attributes, as she only brings up the term of categorisation ('chainik') and does not find it necessary to provide any further evaluation. Another example of how *Chainik*'s category membership is made accountable through invoking expectations bound up with the category 'dummy' is illustrated by Images 66–67. *Krasa* has opened a thread discussing what to do when one forgets a password or email address necessary to access a social network. *Krasavchik* links it with *Chainik*, based on an assessment of the topic as a manifestation of 'lacking knowledge in the field of IT', as would be expected of members of the category 'dummy'.

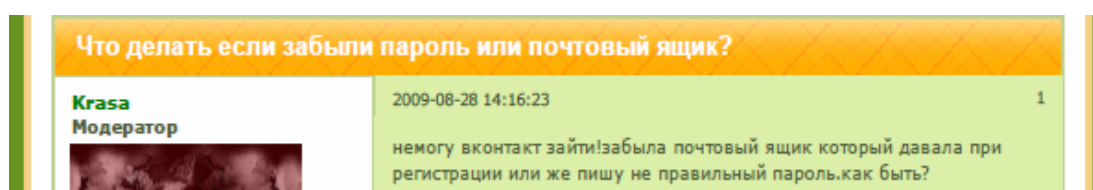


Image 66. What to do when you forget a password or an email address? / I can't access VKontakte!¹⁰⁰ I forgot the email address that I used for / the registration or I'm writing an incorrect password. what to do?

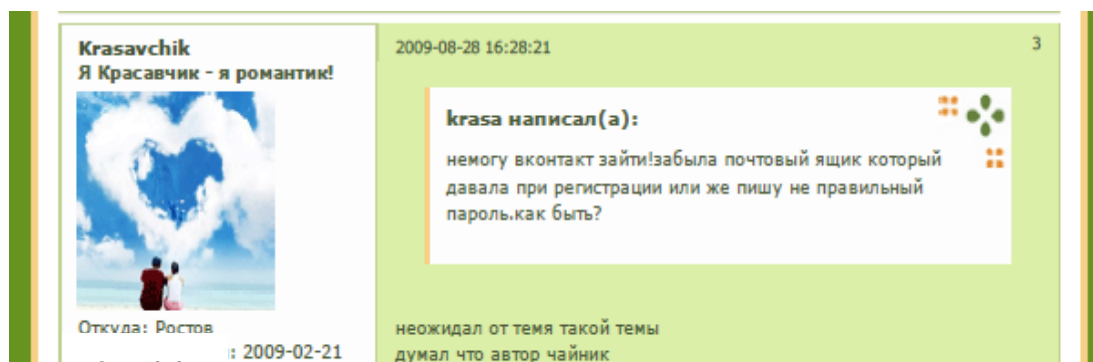


Image 67. {see Image 66} / I didn't expect such a topic from you / I thought chainik was the author

Chainik's identity as an 'Internet dummy' (which seems to extend to other aspects of modern technology as well, such as mobile phones) is thus related to the semantics of

¹⁰⁰ Social network 'In Touch'.

his username, in the sense that it is constructed in reference to the category of people who are labelled *чайник* in CMC. *Chainik* creates an image of an old-fashioned technophobic person. Taking on relational identities of novice, student, non-expert vs. tutor, experts, and competent users works as self-categorisation and self- and other-positioning.

The second (after enacting the ‘Internet dummy’) observable type of *Chainik*’s behaviour can be described as acting like a person who is unintelligent in general and who does not make valuable, relevant or expected contributions to the conversations. One of the features of this performance is producing posts with an unclear meaning and communicative purpose. Many of the posts are neither logically connected with any of the preceding posts nor contain quotes or other indications that they are written to address specific interlocutors (Images 68–70). Sometimes the impression of their senselessness is enhanced by grammatical and stylistic errors (Image 70). They distort both the structure and the content of the conversation, and attract attention by their irrelevance.

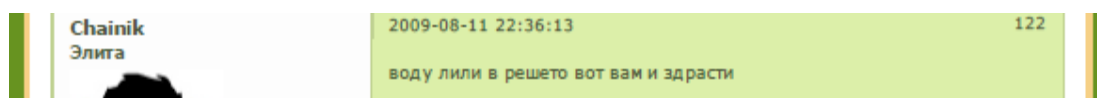


Image 68. they poured water into a sieve what a welcome to you

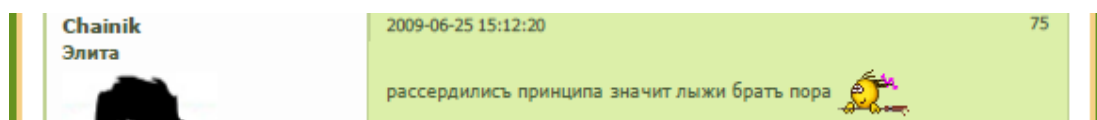


Image 69. the principals got angry which means it's time to take the ski

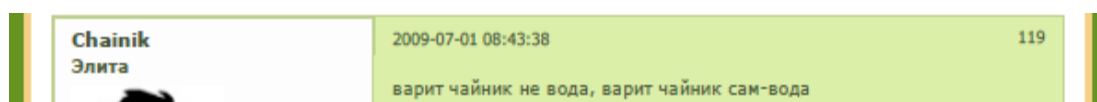


Image 70. cooks chainik not water, cooks chainik water-himself

On other occasions, *Chainik*’s utterances refer to specific posts and include wordplay and paraphrasing of other people’s words, deconstructing their utterances and distorting their meaning (Images 71–72). He clearly indicates the target, and thus

does not just attract attention with the peculiar content but also challenges a specific person to respond. These kinds of comments may be interpreted as mocking and jibing, and be found provocative or even offensive when taken personally as an intention to make fun of the speaker.

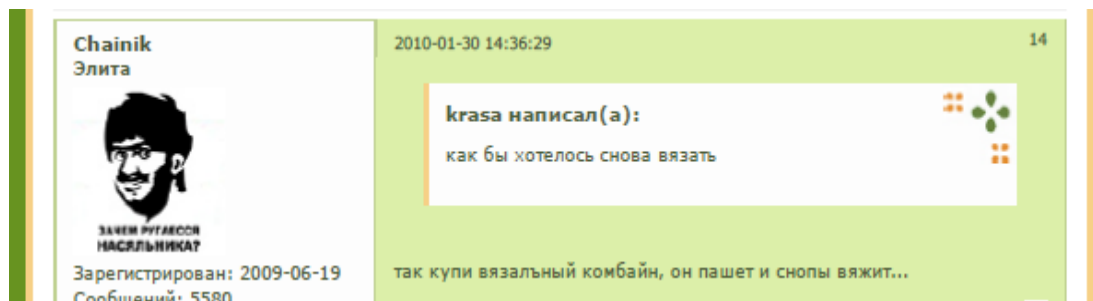


Image 71. {**krasa wrote:** / I would so much like to knit again¹⁰¹} / **get a binding combine then, it tills and binds sheaves...**

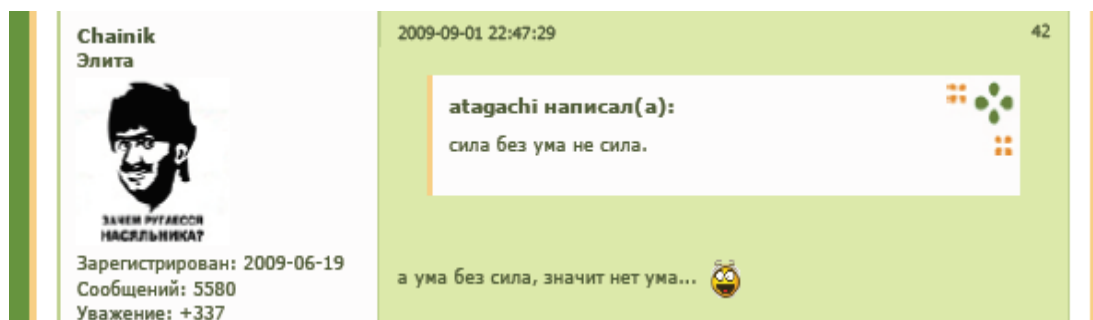


Image 72. {**atagachi wrote:** / strength with no mind is no strength.} / **and mind with no strength,¹⁰² means there is no mind...**

Occasionally, *Chainik* responds directly to the discussion topics (Images 73–76).

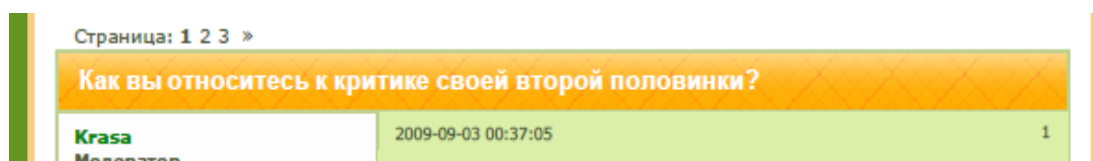


Image 73. **How do you relate to the critique of your second half?**

¹⁰¹ *Вязать* [v'iazat'] means both 'to knit' and 'to bind'.

¹⁰² Ungrammatical usage of 'mind' and 'strength' (incorrect case).

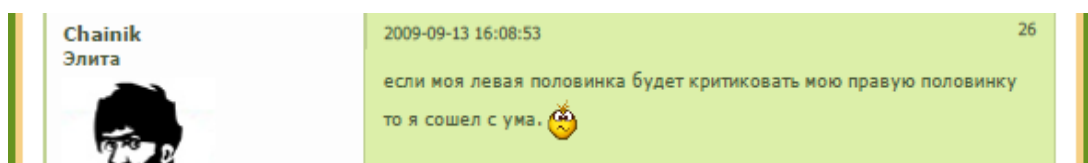


Image 74. if my left half criticises my right half / then I've gone insane.



Image 75. Your recent purchase for your home?

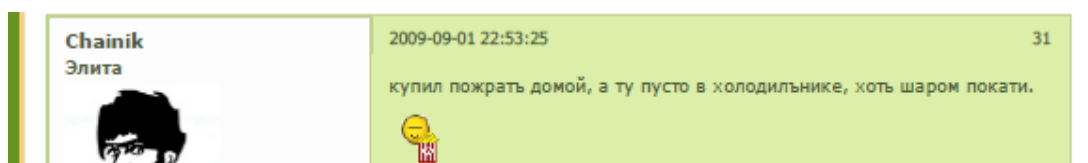


Image 76. I bought something to munch on at home, as my fridge was as bare as the palm of my hand.

In general, one gets the impression that *Chainik* will not miss an opportunity to make a joking comment, regardless of what topic is being discussed. Another type of utterance produced by him that can be considered part of his performance is the poetry he writes, mostly to celebrate birthdays and other occasions. They are characterised by simple, naïve rhymes and content that seems unclear, if not nonsensical (Images 77–80).

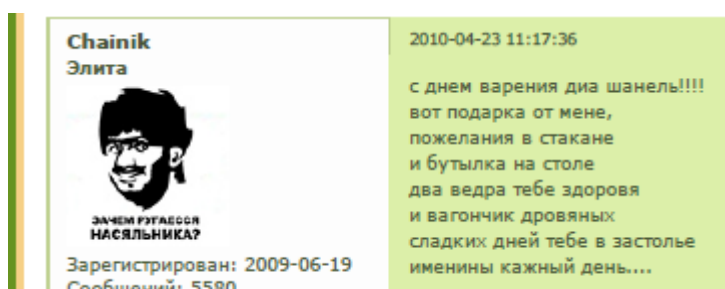


Image 77. happy jam-day to chanel!!!! / here's a present from me, / best wishes in the glass / and a bottle on the table / two bucketfuls of health / and a little carriage of the woodens / sweet days spent on feasting / and a name-day every day....

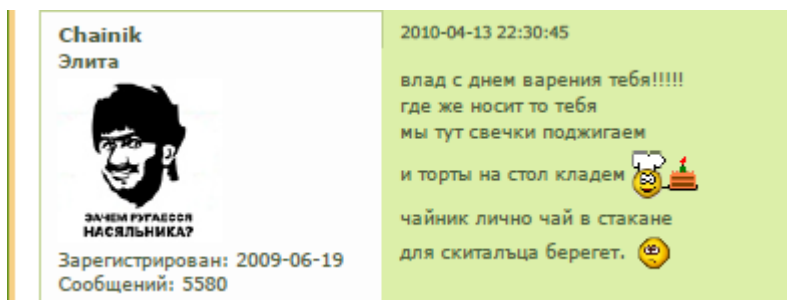


Image 78. vlad happy jam-day to you!!!! / where on Earth are you wandering / we light candles here / and put birthday cakes on the table / chainik himself a glass of tea / saves for the wanderer.

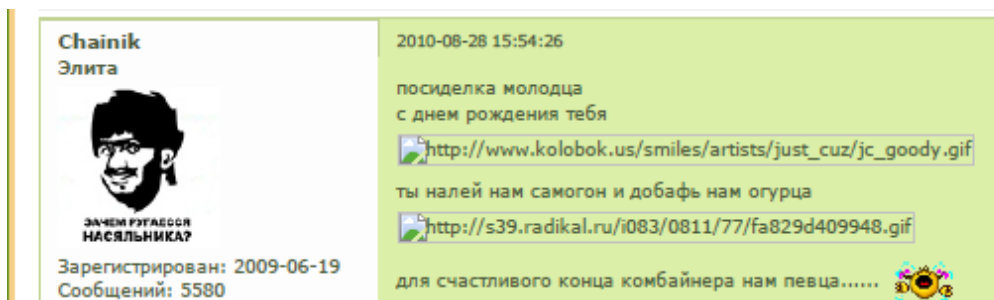


Image 79. to the fine posidelka / happy birthday / pour some moonshine for us and add some cucumber / and give us a combine-operating singer for a happy ending

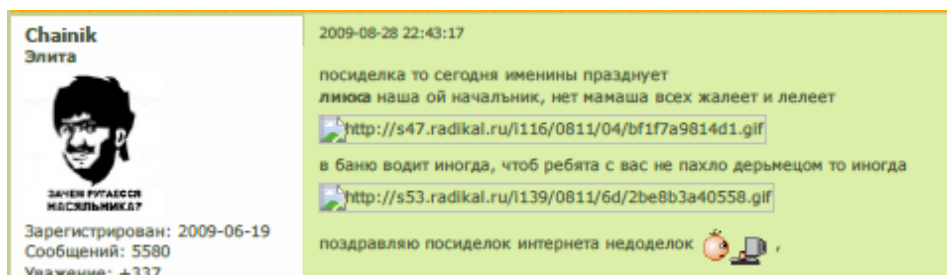


Image 80. posidelka is celebrating its name-day today / likka oh our boss, no, a mommy sympathetic and caring to everyone / takes us to the bath-house occasionally / so that you kids don't sometimes smell like shit / best wishes to posidelki, the shoddy job of the internet

These kinds of posts rarely generate uptakes; however, they generate numerous reactions in the form of metacomments, often humorous if not sarcastic (Image 81), that hint at the ‘foolishness’ of *Chainik*’s posts.

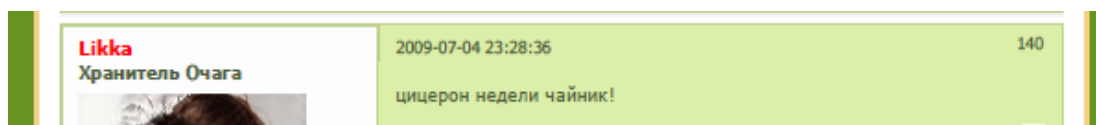


Image 81. chainik the cicero of the week!

In some comments, *Chainik*’s category membership is mobilised to evaluate the inadequacy of his behaviour. Image 82 suggests that he is trying to achieve something beyond competence: it contrasts the category ‘teapot’ with the category ‘samovar’, which has a related function but is perceptibly more valuable. Image 83 presents a similar comparison. The MCD¹⁰³ used involves the arrangement of the categories ‘chainik’ and ‘coffee pot’ according to age or stage of life (‘by the production date’), where the category ‘coffee pot’ represents a ‘schoolboy’, whereas ‘chainik’ is no longer a schoolboy, therefore should not act like one.

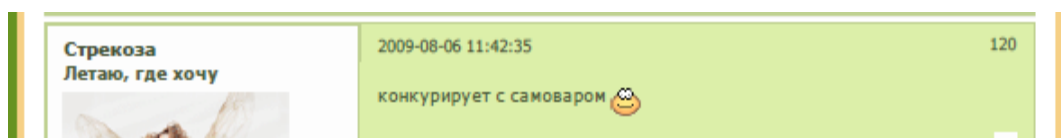


Image 82. competes with a samovar

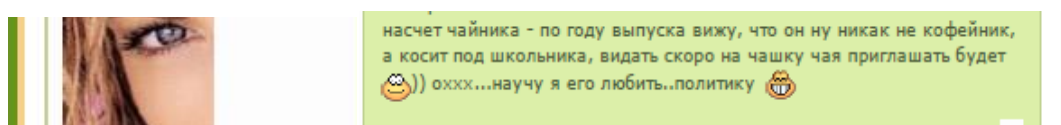


Image 83. as for chainik – by the production date I can see, that he’s in no way a coffee pot, / and plays a schoolboy (...)

¹⁰³ These kinds of MCDs are called ‘positioned-category devices’. As Hester (1998) explains, they include membership categories arranged in positions that are higher and lower in relation to one another, so that ‘if a person is an X, but he or she behaves like a Y, where X and Y are positioned higher and lower relative to each other as members of a positioned category device, then that person is due either praise or complaint’. They are often used in communication to make category contrasts.

Chainik's behaviour is evaluated as immature by asking about his age or grade (Images 84–85). Immaturity in adults might be associated with low intelligence or acting 'silly', which are attributes of the category 'dummies'.

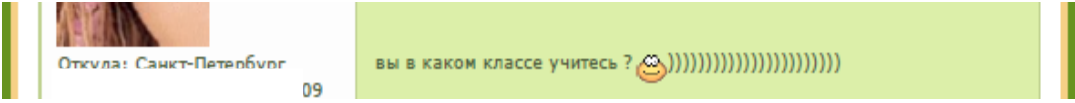


Image 84. what grade are you in 😊?

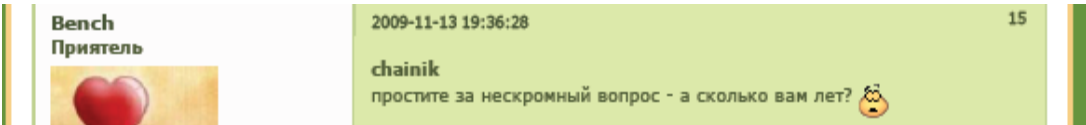


Image 85. chainik / forgive the indiscreet question – but how old are you?

Some comments may express recognition that Chainik's behaviour is a deliberate performance to gain attention. The comment in Image 86 may also be associated with a reference to immaturity as it is generally considered improper for adults to do or say something inappropriate just for the sake of gaining attention.

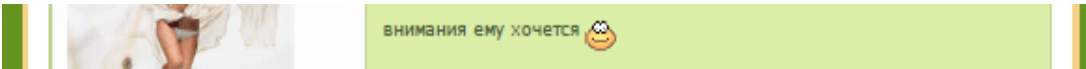


Image 86. he wants attention

There are also numerous comments referring directly to the lack of clarity in his posts as well as their enigmatic nature and indecipherability (Images 87–89), occasionally explicitly requesting repairs ('write more clearly').

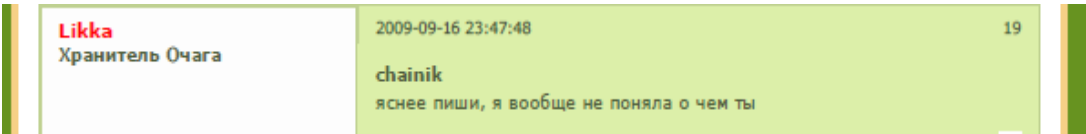


Image 87. chainik / write more clearly, I'm totally not getting you

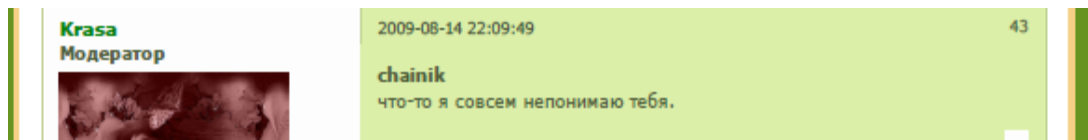


Image 88. **chainik** / for some reason I don't understand you at all.

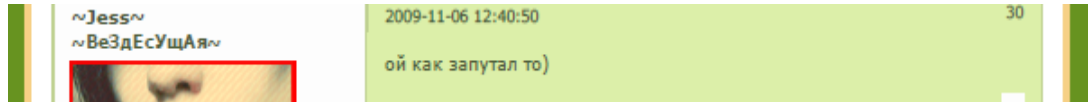


Image 89. **you** have totally confused me

Numerous comments indicate the persistence of this behaviour in terms of its temporal ('again') and spatial ('here as well') extent (Images 90–92). Some include 'extreme case formulations': they present the situation as a 'maximum case' (e.g. 'as always', Image 91, i.e. 'as frequently as possible'). This is a common strategy to highlight that the frequency of a certain phenomenon is unacceptably high and beyond reasonable explanation, and is often used to formulate complaints and accusations. It also indicates the 'indismissible' character of the recurrences as opposed to random occurrences (Pomerantz, 1986: 222–223). Extreme case formulations have also been used to demonstrate the level of incomprehensibility of *Chainik's* utterances ('totally', 'at all' – Images 88–89). The comments also evaluate *Chainik's* communications as puzzling, irrelevant or superfluous by referring to them as 'tales' and 'riddles'.

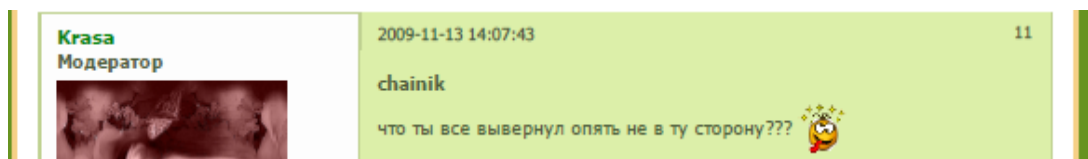


Image 90. **chainik** / what have you twisted it all around again???

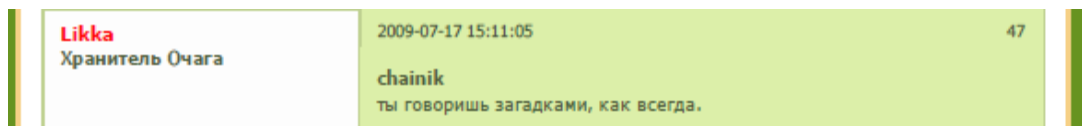


Image 91. **chainik** / you're speaking in riddles, as always.

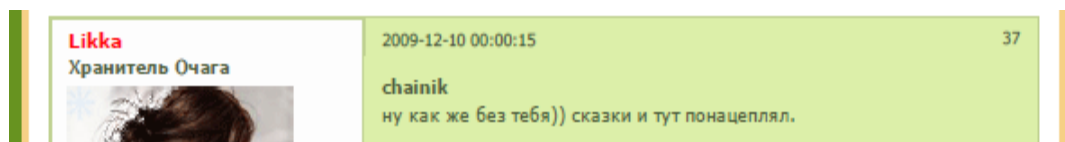


Image 92. **chainik** / how could it be without you ☺ you have churned out your tales here as well.

Comments may also directly indicate the inappropriateness of *Chainik*'s conduct (Image 93).

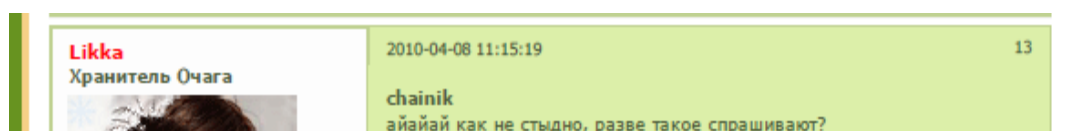


Image 93. **chainik** / ow-ow-ow shame on you, how can you ask about something like that?

Numerous comments reveal that this type of *Chainik*'s behaviour has been assessed by his interlocutors as 'flooding', which is a predicate of the category 'flooder'. As explained before (p. 196), the structure of the conversation is strictly determined and

[P]owerfully usable by anyone, at any time, so as to set a scene for the next turn at talk. Indeed they must be used; it is not the case that talk-in-interaction is a stream of largely inert gas with only the occasional surprise to wake people up. Every turn at talk is part of some structure, plays against some sort of expectation, and in its turn will set up something for the next speaker to be alive to. (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 5–6)

Disrupting the flow of online conversation is called 'flooding'. *Chainik* is repeatedly reprimanded for disrupting the relevance of attended conversations by departing from the topic of the current discussion. The administrators of the forum mobilise their membership of the category 'admin' to activate category-bound rights such as the right to issue notifications, warnings or to remove communications, and to bring him to order (Images 94–97). At times, *Chainik*'s communication triggers annoyance or even stronger emotions, expressed by exclamation marks, extreme case formulations ('all over'), emoticons presenting 'angry faces' or a changed colour of text, especially into red, to attract attention and highlight the importance of the statement.

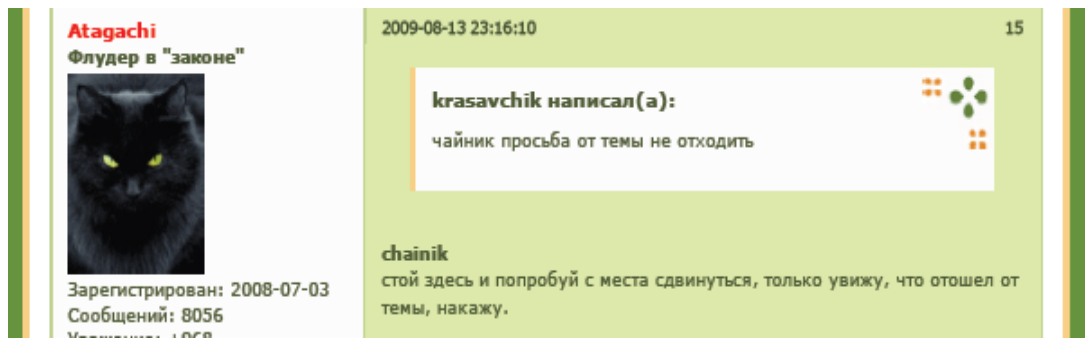


Image 94. {krasavchik wrote: / chainik please don't stray from the topic} / chainik / stand right here and don't even try to move, if I see, that you have wandered away from the topic, I'll punish you.

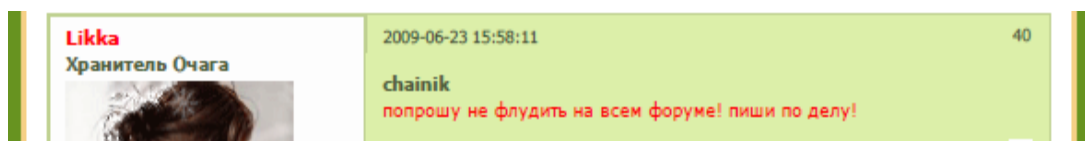


Image 95. chainik / please do not flood all over the forum! stick to the topic!

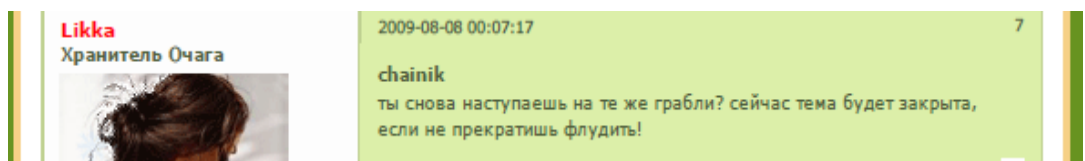


Image 96. chainik / have you stepped on the same rake again? the topic will be closed immediately, / if you don't stop flooding!

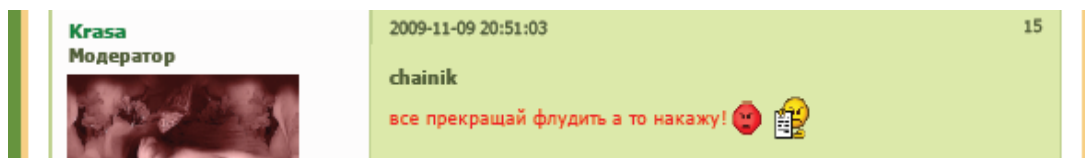


Image 97. chainik / that's it stop flooding or I'll punish you!

Occasionally, Chainik's communication is removed (Image 98).

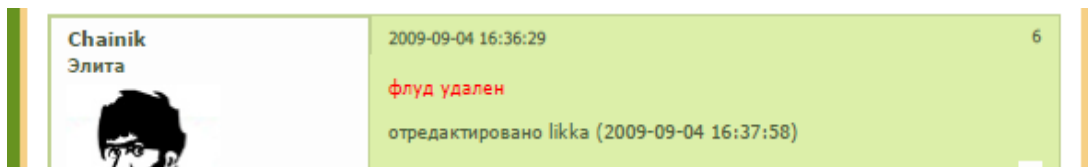


Image 98. flood removed / edited likka

There are also examples of the administrators' metacomments on *Chainik's* behaviour (Images 99–100), which they evaluate as problematic and requiring correcting.

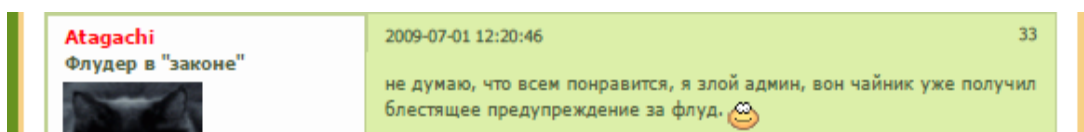


Image 99. I don't think, that everybody's going to like it, I'm a bad admin, chainik already got / one brilliant warning for flooding.

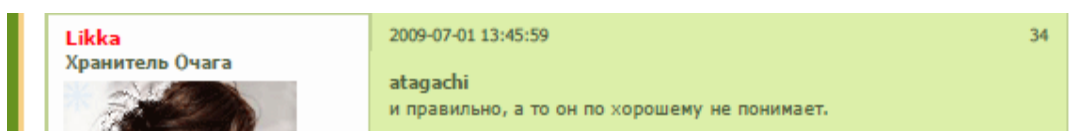


Image 100. atagachi / very well, peacefully he doesn't get it.

Image 101 presents a post that refers to somebody's proposal to organise a ranking of who is the forum's 'best flooder'; *Chainik* was deemed beyond competition – hence, there was no point in arranging such an event.

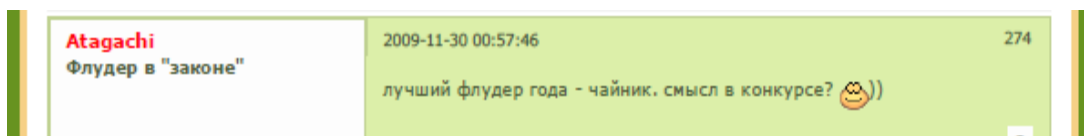


Image 101. best flooder of the year – chainik. what's the point in competition?

Krasavchik, in turn, links *Chainik's* flooding activity with his incompetence in Internet communication, bound up with the category 'dummy' (Image 102; see previously described 'classes' on Internet slang). *Krasavchik's* remedy is to explain

flooding to *Chainik* in simple language illustrated by examples, in the way things are explained to ‘dummies’ or children.


<p>Krasavchik Я Красавчик - я романтик!</p>  <p>Зарегистрирован: 2009-02-21 Сообщений: 5696 Узнавание: 1263</p> <p>Награды: 4 Провел на форуме: 15 дней 5 часов Последний визит: 2010-11-14 18:40:21</p>	<p>2009-10-25 00:30:48</p> <p>объясняю что такое флуд на примере: вот есть тема где вы живете? но вот все пишут: в норильске, в израиле тут появляется чайник и пишет к примеру: я вас люблю и готов вас поцеловать чайник твоя фраза и является флудом в теме короче написал не в тему там же обсуждается где вы живете? отходить от темы далеко лучше не надо, а недалеко можно объясняю на том же примере: типа я вас люблю- это ты уже от темы сильно отошел а вот если напишешь к примеру: типа израиль- страна и т д, то это будет недалекий отход от темы кстати флудить можно только в болталке. во флудилке. объяснил кстати довольно просто. ясно? чайник понял теперь что такое флуд? на практике применять будешь что я тебе рассказал и не флудить?</p>
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Image 102. I'm explaining what flood is on the example:

say we have a topic where do you live?
everybody's writing like this: in noril'sk, in israel
and here appears chainik and writes for example:
I love you and I'm going to kiss you
and your phrase, chainik, constitutes flood in this topic
in short, you've not written on the topic
what's discussed here is where you live
it's not a good idea to stray away from the topic too far, but not too far - you could
I'm explaining further on the same example:
your I love you – it's kinda straying too much from the topic
but if you for example write:
like israel – is a country etc. then it's just slightly straying away from the topic
by the way, you're only allowed to flood in our chatting area.
in the flooding room.
my explanation seems rather straightforward
is it clear?
chainik now you get what flood is?
will you apply in practice what I told you and not flood?

Chainik's uptakes are typically in the form of apologies, excuses and appeals not to implement the penalties (Images 103–107). Some of them look more like

continuation of his flooding rather than sincere apologies; he seems to be using these as additional opportunities to produce more puzzling statements.

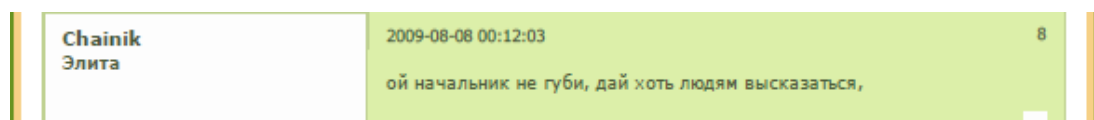


Image 103. please, boss, don't bring me down, let the people comment.

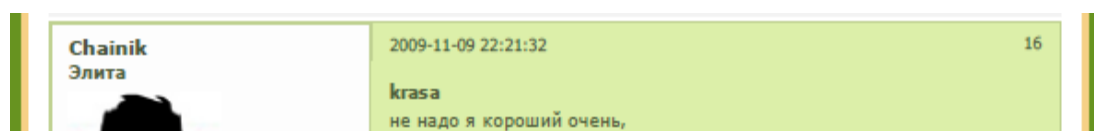


Image 104. **krasa** / please don't I am very good¹⁰⁴

He also uses absurd excuses to claim reduced responsibility (Images 105–107).

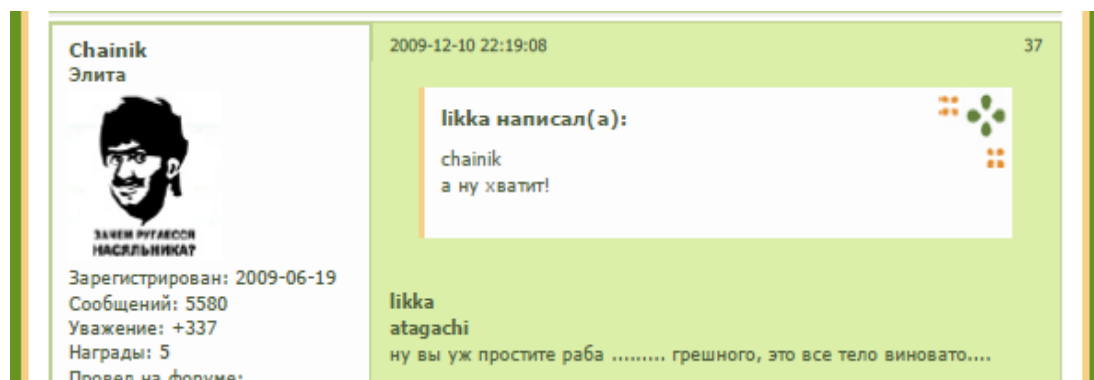
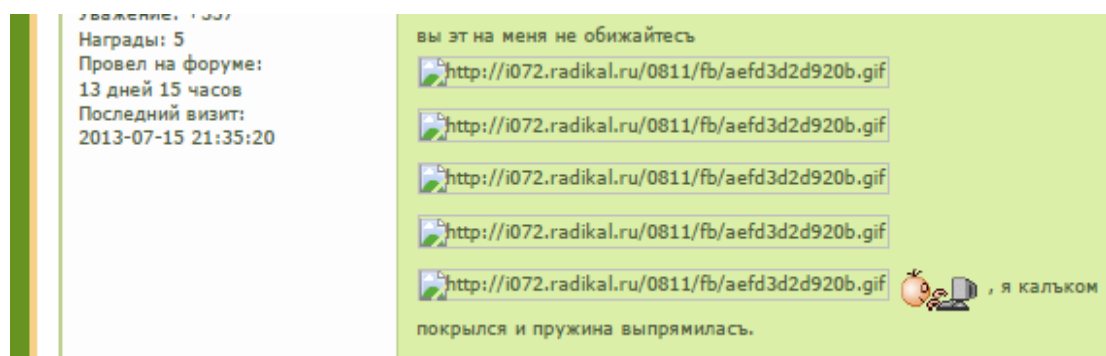


Image 105. {**likka wrote:** / chainik / that's enough!} / **likka** / **atagachi** / will you not forgive the sinful.....slave, the body alone is to blame....



¹⁰⁴ Spelled *короший* [koroshii] instead of *хороший* [khoroshii].

Image 106. don't you be angry at me, a tracing paper covered me and a spring straightened.

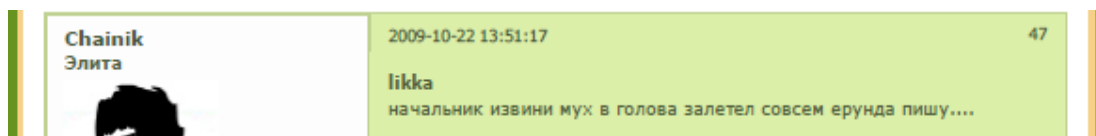


Image 107. likka / boss forgive me a fly flew into my head and I'm writing complete rubbish...¹⁰⁵

At times, *Chainik's* own metacomments evaluate his utterances as lacking sense. This might be read as making excuses or the opposite, drawing attention to his posts (Image 108).

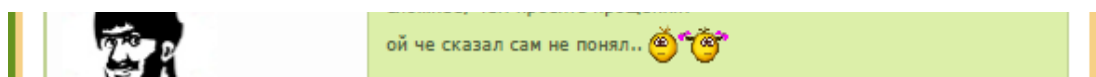


Image 108. oh, I myself don't get what I said..

By acting 'foolishly' *Chainik* makes accountable his identity as a 'dummy'. At times, however, he expresses discontent and disappointment with the reactions of his interlocutors when his statements are misunderstood, perhaps when confusion was not intended (Image 109–112). This may indicate that 'talking rubbish' has been established as a category-bound activity and his sincere errors are also taken as part of his 'dummy' performance.

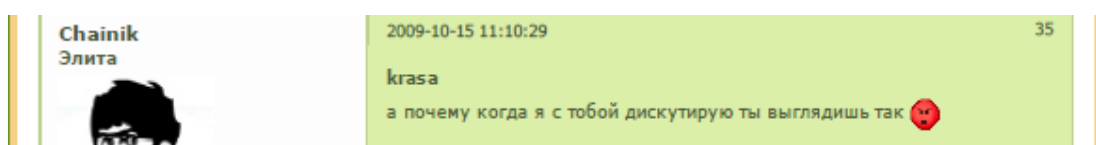


Image 109. krasa / why is it that when we have a discussion, you look like this

¹⁰⁵ Written in ungrammatical Russian – wrong gender and cases.

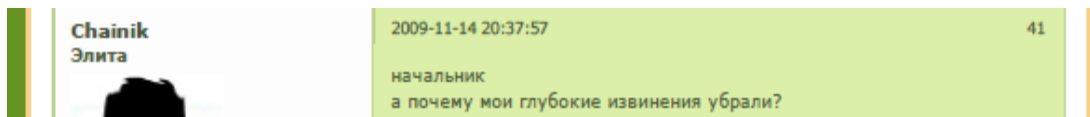


Image 110. boss / why have you removed my sincere apologies?

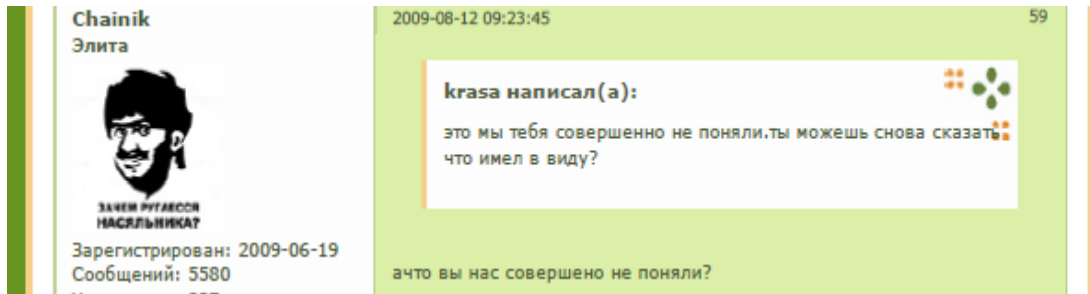


Image 111. {krasa wrote: / it looks like we completely misunderstood you. could you repeat / what you meant?} / what did you completely misunderstand about us?

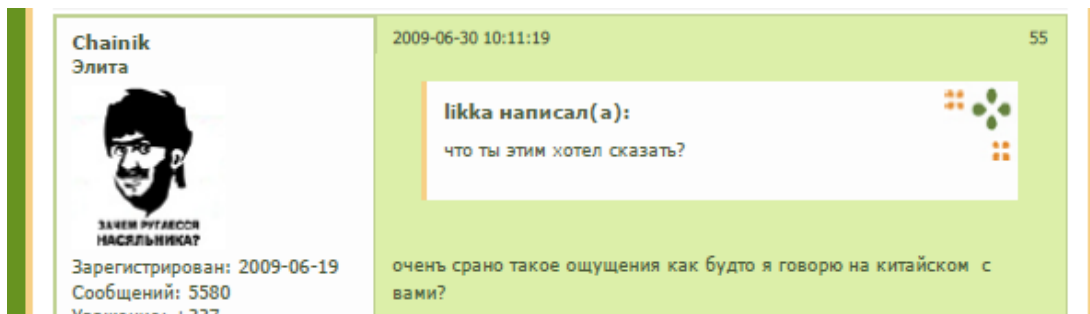


Image 112. {likka wrote: / what did you mean by this?} / it's a very shitty feeling as if I spoke Chinese with you?

One of the explanations of his username that *Chainik* provides may indicate that he expected his conduct to be criticised. He points at its derogatory character, which may serve as a strategy to claim reduced responsibility and therefore to legitimise his conduct. The username may thus serve as a mask to mitigate risky behaviour and protect him from consequences. Therefore, the hedging character of his statement may indicate that his conduct is deliberate (Image 113).

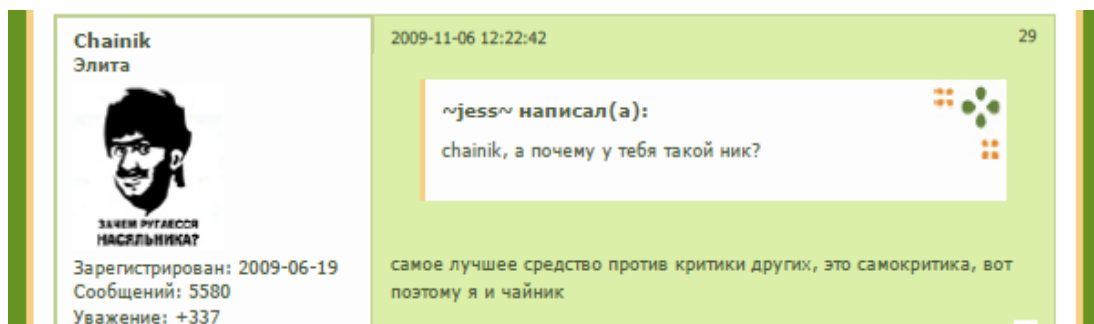


Image 113. {~jess~ wrote: / chainik, why do you have such nick?} / the best means against others' criticism is self-criticism, this / is why I am chainik

A confirmation of the deliberately provocative character of some of his posts may also be found in another statement (Image 114). Here, he self-ascribes attributes of being a 'provoker' and 'no good', but in a mitigated form that might be seen as joking (e.g. by deliberate misspelling and emoticons).

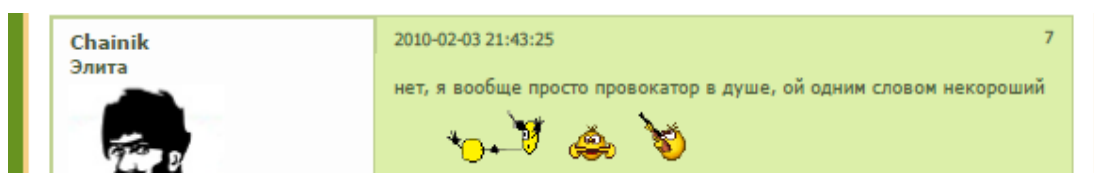


Image 114. in general I'm just a provoker at heart, oh no cood¹⁰⁶ at all in short

Chainik also admits that he was banned from another forum. In the topic 'Have you ever been banned on the Internet?' he wrote (Image 115):

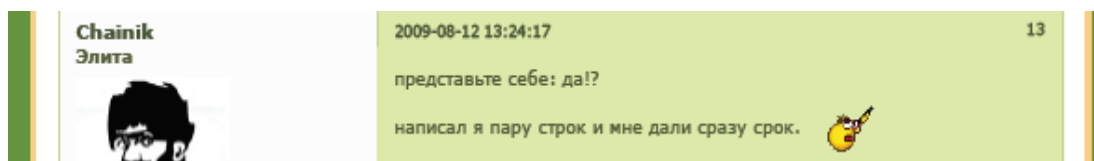


Image 115. I have, can you imagine?! / a few sentences did I say got a sentence straight away.

This means that in other places *Chainik's* behaviour might not be accepted, which shows that the relationship-management strategies he uses in *Posidelki* are efficient.

¹⁰⁶ Chainik misspells 'not good' as *некороший* [nekoroshii] instead of *нехороший* [nekhoroshii].

These include self-categorisation as a ‘dummy’ to negotiate reduced responsibility. Repeated engagement in risky behaviours may show *Chainik*’s confidence that it would not bring serious consequences.

Chainik’s behaviour may be linked to the category of ‘dummy’ in the sense of ‘unintelligent person’ through behaviour that has been deemed immature, incomprehensible, inappropriate and related to incompetence in CMC. Due to their disruptive character, these activities have been tied with the category ‘flooder’; however, mitigated by *Chainik*’s being a ‘dummy’, they did not entail serious consequences. *Chainik* seems to have been ascribed a role of the ‘forum’s fool’ that differs from that of a ‘flooder’ in the way that the latter deliberately and maliciously destroys the communication, while behaviour of the former might be laughable, comical, eccentric or annoying, but in general harmless. In addition, some of his behaviours bring to mind ‘a fool’ in the sense of a court jester who under the mask of providing amusement has something deeper to say, whose messages have a double meaning. Triggering emotions seems *Chainik*’s strategy to encourage discussion; making people read between the lines and try to solve his riddles might be meant as thought-provoking. The username, working as a court jester’s mask, enables freedom of speech unavailable to other users but also mitigates the potentially offensive character of *Chainik*’s utterances. Furthermore, such conduct generates constant attention and makes *Chainik* recognisable and remembered. As a result, his communication receives numerous responses, in the form of both calls to order from the administration and comments from other interlocutors who acknowledge such conduct as typical of him. They often highlight the recurrent character of this behaviour, in terms of its both temporal and special durability and repeatability (*как всегда* ‘as always’, *опять* and *снова* ‘again’, *на всем форуме* ‘all over the forum’, *и тут* ‘here as well’, *флудер года* ‘flooder of the year’, *ну как же без тебя* ‘how could it be without you’). Although this is in general undesirable behaviour, it has secured him recognisability.

Another tendency in *Chainik*’s conduct, next to enacting a ‘fool’ and an ‘Internet dummy’, that can be read as a reference to the secondary meaning of the term *чайник*, refers to naïveté and a lack of knowledge and sophistication. *Chainik*

repeatedly claims reduced responsibility due to his supposed lack of knowledge by bringing up his illiteracy and a lack of reasoning ability as attributes of category *чайник*, ‘chainik’ (Images 116–119).

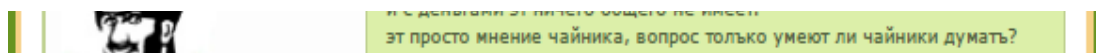


Image 116. just chainik’s opinion, there’s only one question are chainiks able to think?

Chainik’s frequently used tactic of identity construction is positive self-presentation by seeming self-deprecation: for example, by using rhetorical questions (Images 116 and 117). On the one hand, rhetorical questions indicate that the opposite is true, but on the other, it is a common perception that a preferred reaction to a self-deprecating stance is to disalign with it (Pomerantz, 1984: 64).

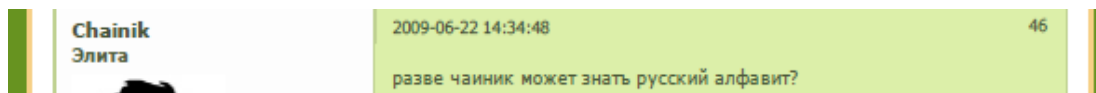


Image 117. can (a) chainik possibly know the Russian alphabet?

Another manoeuvre is a humorous negation of the negative self-evaluation; e.g. Image 118, where at the end of his utterance *Chainik* humorously negates his self-deprecating stance (‘he’s as simple / as three kopecks, for those who don’t know soviet three kopecks’ indicates that he actually is not simple).

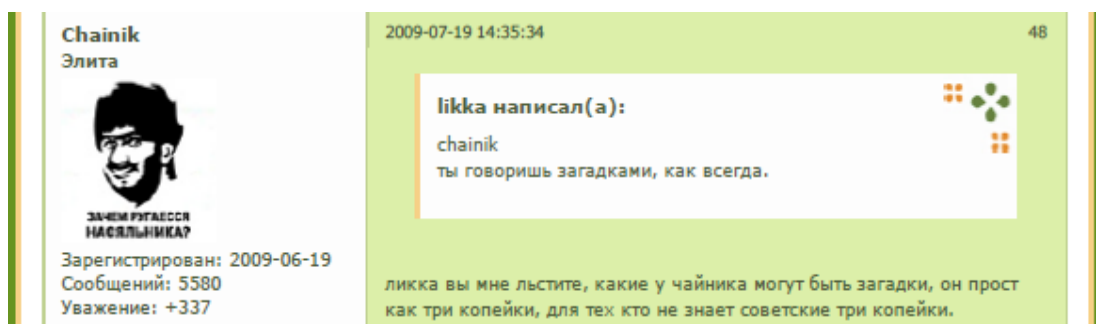


Image 118. {likka wrote: / chainik / you’re speaking in riddles, as always.} / likka you are flattering me, what puzzles can (a) chainik offer, he’s as simple / as three kopecks, for those who don’t know soviet three kopecks.

Chainik uses illiteracy as an attribute of the category *чайник* in an opaque way to constructs his identity: his acts of negative self-evaluation might be seen as ‘false modesty’. Thus, by referring to his supposed simplicity and naïveté, *Chainik* may be drawing attention to his sophistication, often in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Such suggestion finds confirmation in one of *Chainik*’s explanations of his username choice (Image 119).

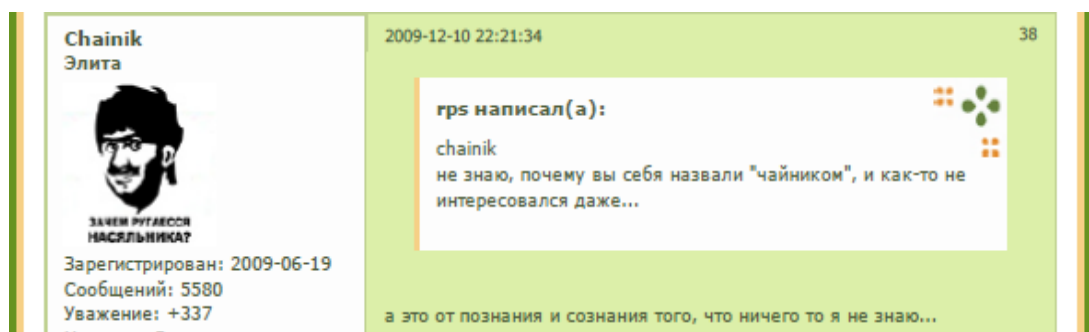


Image 119. {**rps wrote:** / chainik / I don’t know why you have called yourself “chainik”, and didn’t even bother pondering...} / **it’s because of the recognition and awareness of the fact that I don’t actually know anything...**

By referring to the ‘Socratic paradox’ that points out that the more you know the more you realise how little you know, *Chainik* indicates that his lack of knowledge actually results from a limitation of human learning capacity rather than his own ignorance. This statement suggests that for him to recognise his lack of knowledge involved a lot of learning. He offers an alternative reading of the property ‘lack of knowledge’ that should be read as an aspect of his identity. This can be observed in his numerous claims to knowledge and authority. He mostly claims authority in relation to fundamental sociocultural issues, for example politics and religion, that form the basis of the moral order in societies. One of the strategies *Chainik* uses repeatedly is the reference to acknowledged authorities (Images 120–125), a common strategy to support, validate and legitimise stances of authority and knowledge (Jaffe, 2009b: 7). It may be seen as one of the tactics that Pomerantz (1984: 608) refers to as ‘the state of affairs being evidenced’, where the words of authorities serve as evidence that the speaker has an authentic knowledge.

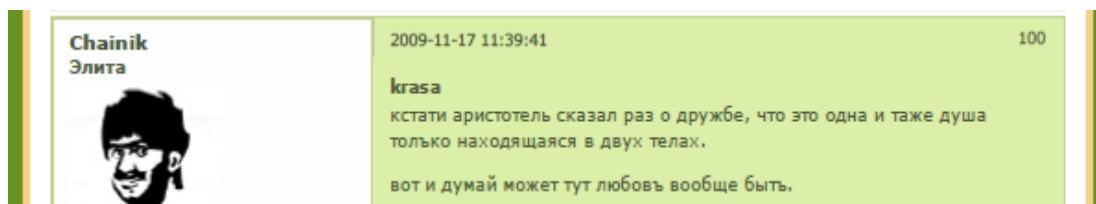


Image 120. **krasa** / by the way aristotle once said about friendship, that it's one soul / placed in two bodies. / now one has to think if there can be any love at all.

For example, by referring to Aristotle in his evaluation of friendship (Image 120), *Chainik* constructs an image of a well-read person who has an authentic knowledge. He takes an impersonal stance (he uses *вот и думай* 'now think' in the generic sense, meaning 'one has to think') which gives it a universalistic character.

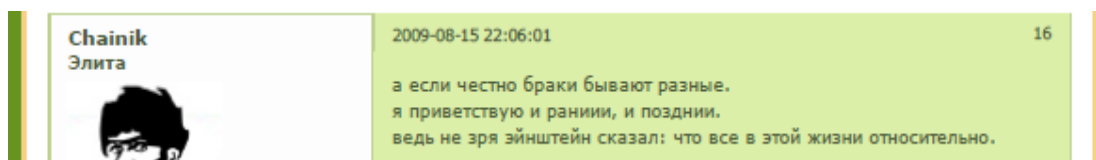


Image 121. **and to be honest there are various marriages. / I support both early and late ones. / indeed, einstein was right to say: everything in this life is relative.**

Chainik highlights the importance of marriage and family a couple of times, which suggests that in this regard he refers to the moral order commonly known as traditional or conservative: people should get married as it is the right and natural thing to do. He takes a personal stance ('I support') but legitimises it by referring to Einstein. The extreme case formulation 'everything' makes the quotation perceptibly applicable to any circumstance, therefore relevant to the topic at hand, i.e. the right time to get married (although *Chainik* chooses not to apply it to the question of whether or not to get married).

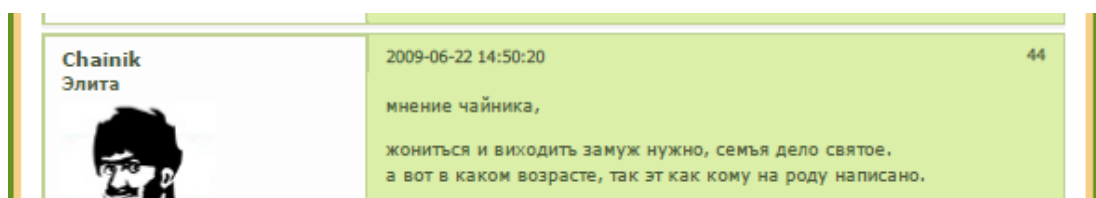


Image 122. chainik's opinion, / one ought to get married, family is a sacred thing. / as for the age, it's whatever you're predestined for.

Chainik explicitly indicates that it is everybody's moral duty to have a family by taking a deontic stance of prescriptive character ('ought to'). Describing a family as 'sacred' is perceptibly a reference to religion. Religion, and more specifically Christianity, is another source of knowledge that *Chainik* repeatedly invokes (Images 123–124).

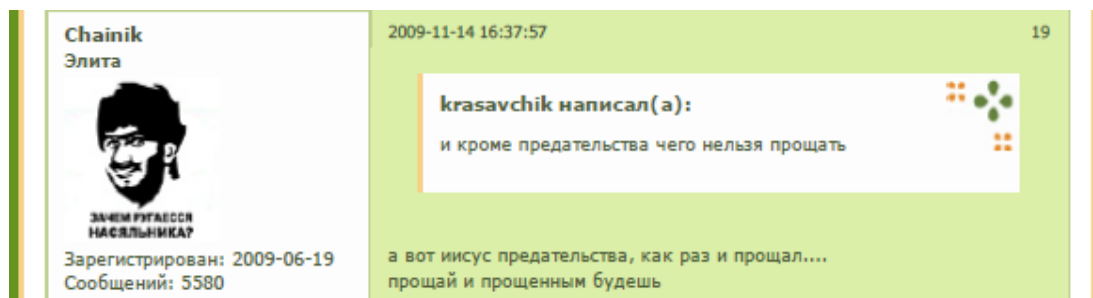


Image 123. {krasavchik wrote: / and besides betrayal what else cannot be forgiven} / yet, betrayals were just what jesus forgave.... / forgive and you will be forgiven

Chainik's authority here is Jesus, a religious figure, whom he presents as a role model in approaching the issue of forgiveness by reporting his stance in an analogical situation. He disaligns himself from the preceding (*Krasavchik*'s) stance by reformulating the question. While bringing up names of scholars perceptibly evidences education and erudition, references to religion can be read as invoking an undisputable moral authority that is not up for verification, which *Chainik* assumes to be taken-for-granted to all his interlocutors. On this basis he claims a privileged knowledge.

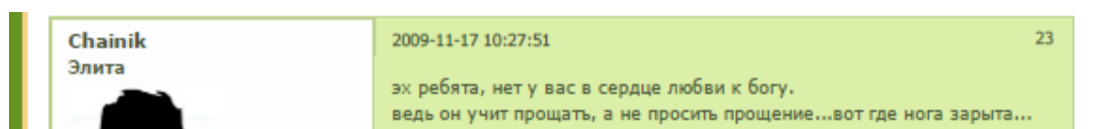
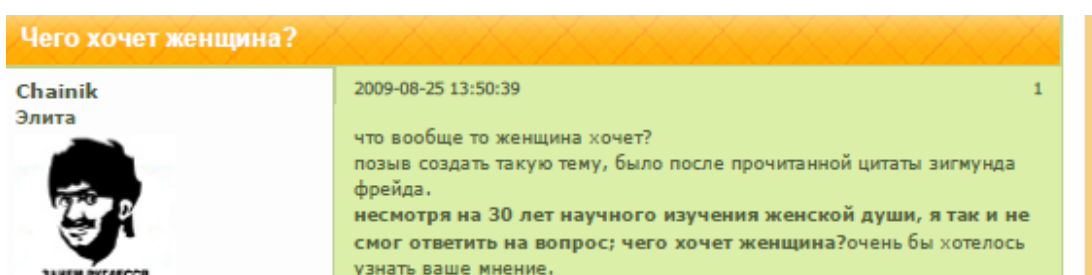


Image 124. alas kids, there's no love of god in your heart. / after all, he teaches how to forgive, not how to ask forgiveness... that's where the shoe pinches...

This (Image 124) utterance, directed at a general audience rather than being a response to a particular post, is a judgemental and prescriptive deontic stance conveyed in the convention of preaching. *Chainik* uses Christian morality as a correct and universally applicable way to understand and tackle social and existential issues. By negative other-evaluation through attributing a stance of moral failure to his audience, he positions himself as morally upright and therefore authorised to reprimand others.

Another *Chainik's* strategy of negotiation of moral norms while positioning himself as morally upright is generalisation. Generalising is a tactic of stance validation that facilitates framing personal opinions, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. as shared and taken for granted, activating a mechanism that Jaffe (2009b: 7) describes as 'shift[ing] the location of epistemic authority from the individual to the societal level'. Promotion of the given account as a commonly accepted norm makes it look legitimate and convincing. Additionally, framing certain concepts as shared may be used to constructing the sense of solidarity by 'universalising experience'. Another tactic to achieve this is by distancing himself from 'others' by framing them as outsiders. This is achieved by a negative evaluation of categories of people, institutions and other phenomena, for example using 'disapproval or derision' (Scheibman, 2007: 112–134). *Chainik's* acts of generalisation are particularly noticeable in his stances taken towards the membership categories 'women' and 'Americans'¹⁰⁷ (Images 125–134, Example 1).



¹⁰⁷ Although he never states it explicitly, it is reasonable to read *Chainik's* stance towards Americans as inspired by the well-known stand-up comedian Mikhail Zadornov's recognisable routines that present a grotesque image of Americans as not just stupid, but as the embodiment of stupidity. *Chainik* repeatedly constructs a very similar images of Americans that he uses as an illustration of extreme stupidity.

Image 125. **What does a woman want?** / what, in essence, does a woman want? / the impulse to set up this topic came after I read an extract from sigmund / freud. / despite 30 years of scientific research on the feminine soul, I still could not / answer the question: what does a woman want? I would very much like to / know your opinion.

In his topic ‘What does a woman want?’ (Image 125) *Chainik* refers to a common perception that there are two and only two sexes (Garfinkel, 1967: 116–118). He presents women as a homogenous category whose members share goals that are not known to men. This situation is conceptualised as problematic and made an object of scientific inquiry (this means that women also do not know what they want) but appears too difficult to discover (they must therefore be random and unpredictable, hence irrational). *Chainik* validates this state of affairs by bringing up Freud, commonly acknowledged as an analyst of human psychology, and puts up the issue for evaluation. This approach frames the male ‘mode’ of human existence and experience as a norm, in relation to which a female one constitutes a deviation, which is up for scrutiny against the ‘norm’. *Chainik* conceptualises the relationship between categories of males and females as a simple, binary division (in terms of psychological qualities in this case), but also as hierarchical, where men are superior to women. In this way, while presenting himself as a male, he claims superiority over females and moral authority to scrutinise and judge their thinking and behaviour.

Chainik often uses the means of membership categorisation to construct his moral righteousness by negative other-evaluation. He frames certain groups of people as ‘others’ or ‘subordinate’ in general, or as ‘outsiders’ within categories, who are morally deficient as they do not meet the ‘norms’ expected from authentic or legitimate members of these categories (Images 124–125).

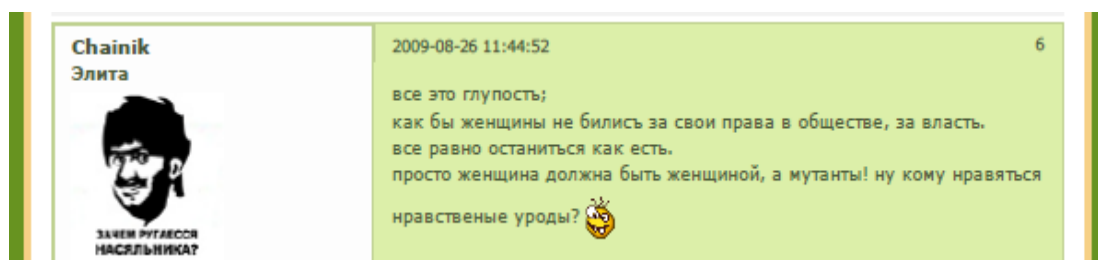


Image 126. it's all nonsense; / no matter how women fight for their rights in the society, for power. / it will all stay as it is. / simply a woman should be a woman, and mutants! Well, who likes / moral freaks?

Chainik frames the activity of ‘fighting for one’s rights’ as problematic in the membership category ‘woman’ (Image 126). He opens his post by trivialising the issue (*злуность*, ‘nonsense, silliness’). By extreme case formulations (‘no matter what’, ‘all’), he suggests that having no power in society is such an inherent aspect of womanhood that it will necessarily last irrespective of any circumstance: no matter what women do, they are predestined to remain powerless as it is the only natural order of things. Members of this category who fight for their rights are presented as deviant and defective, and therefore immoral (see ‘protection against induction’ and ‘category-bound activities’ on p. 84). Here *Chainik* performs a negative evaluation of ‘immoral’ women in relation to the moral system in which gender roles are strictly established, and claims moral authority by positioning himself as a proponent of the morally correct stance. He does not consider it necessary to provide any evidence to support his position – his own declarative assertion is sufficient.¹⁰⁸ By the way how he formulates his rhetorical question about others’ attitudes towards women who ‘fight for their rights’, he attributes non-likability to them: it invites alignment with *Chainik*’s stance by implying that it would be a normal and accepted reaction to dislike ‘mutants’ and ‘freaks’. This may also be heard as a tactic of ‘universalising experience’ by constructing a collective stance of solidarity against morally wrong society members. This post indicates a strong engagement with the topic. First, *Chainik* expresses his attitude by an epistemic stance, highlighting the high level of certainty by extreme case formulation. He then upgrades his statement by a deontic stance of prescriptive character (‘a woman should be a woman’) and then upgrades further by an affective stance (‘who likes’). Additionally, he uses emotionally charged expressions (‘mutants’ and ‘freaks’).

Another category that *Chainik* often evaluates negatively are Americans, especially in terms of their intellectual capacity.

¹⁰⁸ As Pomerantz (1988: 295) states: ‘A technique for endorsing a description as true is to simply assert it – produce an unmodified declarative assertion.’



Image 127. {**snow white girl wrote:** / ege not ega ☺ / unbelievable, that you don't know, what it is / unified state examination in the form of a test.} / **snow white girl / well in my time, we took five or six state exams. while just one means they are turning russia into dumb americoz.... we are degrading in / seven-league steps...**

This time (Image 127) *Chainik* constructs a number of contrasting categories. First, he contrasts ‘us’ from the past who ‘took several exams’, with ‘us’ today who take one examination: those who had to take multiple examinations are intellectually superior as five or six exams sounds more demanding than one, which sounds ‘easier’. Then he brings up a category of an unspecified ‘them’ who do harm to ‘us’ by induction of degradation through introducing one state examination. Finally, he makes predictions about the future ‘us’, who will be equal to the category ‘Americans’, invoked as the embodiment of stupidity to illustrate the severity of the degradation. He uses a figurative expression (‘seven-league steps’) to illustrate the pace of degradation. *Chainik* criticises the new examination system, although he has no knowledge of its functioning (he admits that he did not know about the changes in the examination system). He also assumes a link between two phenomena: a single exam and immediate intellectual and/or educational degradation of the society. He also presents dumbness as the Americans’ category-bound property that is particularly characteristic of and relevant to them, and uses this link in the capacity of extreme case formulation (i.e. one cannot get any dumber than Americans are). Additionally, distortion of the categorisation term ‘americoz’ highlights his contemptuous attitude. *Chainik* positions himself as well-educated (one of those who took multiple examinations) in contrast to both Americans and future Russians.

Other examples of *Chainik*'s attempts to boost his self-image by negative other-evaluation can be found in the conversation between *Chainik* and *DARTVENOM* on the topic dedicated to Halloween. *Chainik* constructs his intellectual and moral superiority by distancing himself from celebrating Halloween. *DARTVENOM* disaligns himself with *Chainik*'s stance by questioning his knowledge. *Chainik* explains his stance by constructing two contrasting membership devices to prove that celebrating Halloween is morally questionable.

*Example 1.*¹⁰⁹

1. ***Chainik***: we don't celebrate such holidays they are as dull as americans
2. ***DARTVENOM***: explain more specifically, what do Americans have to do with it?...
3. ***Chainik***: well, only Anglo-Saxons celebrate them we the orthodox shouldn't sit with demons at one table.
4. ***DARTVENOM***: don't you think that everybody judges by themselves?... halloween is one of the most ancient traditions/rituals in the world... in this celebration the celtic tradition to honour evil spirits met the Christian one – the worship of all saints...
5. ***Chainik***: that's certainly the very first truth. gaining experience in the process of living we always judge by ourselves. and the tradition might be celtic but americans have simplified it beyond recognition, so that it's like rubber boots – one size fits all....to conclude as a russian I find it more familiar and appropriate to worship the god of sun yarilo.....if I'm interested in pagan culture of early slavs...
6. ***DARTVENOM***: which means you're a demon...
7. ***Chainik***: well I don't know I've not really noticed the demons they are violent by nature..... destroy everything around them...
8. ***DARTVENOM***: demons don't necessarily destroy all around them... they might write any rubbish... and the word demon¹¹⁰ you write with one "s" ... fucking erudite...

¹⁰⁹ The images of this conversation can be found in the Appendix.

¹¹⁰ *бес* [bes].

9. *Chainik*: it's nice to socialise with the learned mind you I might take in something clever. but seriously, when one has no evidence as a counter-argument, then they start pointing at grammatical mistakes. while according to one christian commandment. don't offend, or else you will be offended.....

10. *DARTVENOM*: if you had looked more carefully, you would have noticed, that 'pointing' at your grammatical mistakes was just an addition to my argument regarding the fact, that you're writing bullshit namely...messing up and false interpretation of the Christian commandments...I think god wouldn't approve it...what kind of a Christian are you therefore...you're a demon...

The parties in this dialog, although in conflict, cooperate in establishing the category-bound attributes of the category demons, and negotiate *Chainik*'s own category membership. *Chainik* (1) enters the discussion by taking a stance against celebrating Halloween which he evaluates negatively as 'dull, dumb'. To indicate the level of its dullness he relates it to Americans by hearably linking celebrating Halloween with Americans as their category-bound activity.¹¹¹ *DARTVENOM* (2) disaligns with *Chainik* by deconstructing the link between American and Halloween, and questions *Chainik*'s knowledge by asking him to provide evidence for his statement (*DARTVENOM* does not question dumbness of Americans, though, just linking them with Halloween). In this way, he infers that the link between the category 'American' and the activity of celebrating Halloween cannot be taken for granted and has to be made explicit. *DARTVENOM* might also be seen as 'playing dumb' to avoid inclusion in the contrastive device (Sacks, 1995: 163; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2009: 352–353). He knows in what way Halloween is being linked with Americans but 'plays dumb' to avoid being associated with them or accused of doing something stupid. *Chainik* (3) explains by constructing two contrasting devices, 'the demons' and 'the Orthodox'. He frames these as naturally antagonistic categories. The device 'demons' includes the category 'Americans' now upgraded to 'Anglo-Saxons', to whom he attributes the celebration of Halloween. *Chainik* terms this device 'demons' to illustrate how immoral members of the categories belonging to this device are. He

¹¹¹ Halloween was not celebrated in Soviet Russia, isolated from Western European and American socio-cultural influences, which might be influencing *Chainik*'s perception of direct connection between Halloween and America.

uses it in a similar way to the way he uses the term ‘Americans’ – as a type of extreme case formulation. *Bec* ‘demon; devil’ is as immoral as can be – it symbolises pure evil, hence nothing can be worse. The device ‘Orthodox’, by contrast, represents moral excellence and should not have anything in common with the ‘demons’ (‘shouldn’t sit at one table’).

DARTVENOM (4) accepts *Chainik*’s proposition that ‘demons’ and ‘the Orthodox’ are valid devices to categorise people in terms of moral qualities. However, he disaligns with *Chainik*’s statement by framing his reasoning as ‘judging by oneself’, which is demonstrably one-sided and biased, and therefore unreliable. He delinks Halloween and Anglo-Saxons by pointing to its Celtic origins. He introduces a new category of ‘Celts’ to establish the link between Halloween and Christianity. *Chainik* (5) responds by reframing ‘judging by oneself’ as a valid first-hand experience-based knowledge. To make his argument more convincing, he normalises such behaviour by extreme case formulation: ‘we always judge by ourselves’, i.e. it is a natural and in fact unavoidable thing to do. He argues that early and contemporary celebrations of Halloween are two different activities tied with various categories as the contemporary form of celebrating Halloween has nothing to do with its original form due to its commercialisation by Americans, which he illustrates by a figurative expression (‘like rubber boots’). He self-categorises as Russian to introduce an appropriate standpoint from which he and his interlocutor should evaluate celebrating ancient traditions. By bringing up national and ethnic categories (‘Russians’ and ‘Slavs’), he avoids linking pagan cults directly with the religion-based device ‘Orthodox’. Additionally, he contrasts Russians and Slavs with other cultures and traditions: American, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic, which works as framing and contrasting ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘others’. It is one of the rare occasions when *Chainik* takes a personal stance: ‘I find it’, rather than making a general statement or referring to other authorities. *DARTVENOM* (6) frames the activity of worshipping Yarilo as a predicate of the ‘demons’ (by linking it apparently with religion rather than ethnicity) and ascribes *Chainik* to them. *Chainik* (7) rejects such attribution because he does not share the demons’ predicate of ‘being violent’, using an extreme case formulation to illustrate this (‘destroying everything around them’). The phrase ‘I don’t know’ serves amongst others as a doubt marker used to question the validity of a statement

and suggest reconsideration (Pomerantz, 1986: 226). *DARTVENOM* (8) introduces activity that he links with both the ‘demons’ and *Chainik*, namely, distributing unverified statements and in this way re-categorises *Chainik* as a ‘demon’ again. Additionally, he questions *Chainik*’s erudition by pointing at the orthographic mistake that he spotted, which also works to undermine *Chainik*’s reliability as a knowledgeable interlocutor.

Chainik (9) ignores the first part of *DARTVENOM*’s argument and focuses on the part about the mistake. He sarcastically calls him ‘an educated person’ from whom he may learn (after this statement he writes ‘but seriously’, which indicates that this was not meant to be taken ‘seriously’). Then he dismisses *DARTVENOM*’s contribution with the accusation that he is trying to make orthographic errors relevant due to the lack of other arguments. He invokes Christian philosophy to frame this behaviour as immoral. In response, *DARTVENOM* (10) argues that bringing up the error was only a side note, while the main reason for categorising *Chainik* as a ‘demon’ was his practice of causing chaos and confusion and distorting the meaning of Christian teachings, which are ‘demon’ predicates. To validate his evaluation of *Chainik*’s behaviour, he invokes Christian philosophy supported by prediction of the opinion of God who is the highest possible authority in terms of Christian moral system. *DARTVENOM*’s argument may look dramatic, but it is not too far from what *Chainik* stated himself elsewhere (Image 114).

In this dialogue, *Chainik* constructs his authority based on contrasting ‘us’ (Russians, Slavs, Orthodox) and ‘them’ or ‘other’ (Americans, Anglo-Saxons, demons). He invokes the moral system in which membership categories in the collection ‘other’ (‘demons’) are bound with attributes that are highly immoral and undesirable. He distances himself from the members of these categories by disapproval and negative other-evaluation and in this way projects his own morality as superior. *Chainik* makes national, ethnic and religious identities relevant in the allocation of morally right and wrong stances. In general, his perspective seems to echo the current official state standpoint, for example in contrasting American and Western European cultures with Slavic ones; however, he never directly specifies the state narrative as a source for his views.

In this episode, *DARTVENOM* challenges *Chainik*'s identity construction as a knowledgeable and moral person, i.e., the construction of the inverted relation between his identity and the semantics of his username, and restores the direct link between these two. His performance of a moral authority has been questioned on the basis that his disruptive communication and false interpretations of Christian teachings link him with the 'demons' and not the 'Orthodox', as he claimed (*DARTVENOM* does not propose that *Chainik* is a defective or deviant member of the 'Orthodox', but denies his membership altogether). Thus, his status claims have been recognised but dismissed.

While *DARTVENOM* enacts a stance of confrontational disagreement characterised by an argumentative and dismissive attitude supported by strong vocabulary ('writing bullshit', 'fucking erudite'), disalignment may be expressed in a more mitigated way, e.g. humorously. In a conversation about a hypothetical situation in a family where a wife earns more than her husband (Images 128–133), a situation *Chainik* frames as problematic, he tries to create a normative context of what is appropriate or inappropriate for husbands and wives to do. He begins by taking a jocular tone and including a figurative formulation framing such a state of affairs as comical.

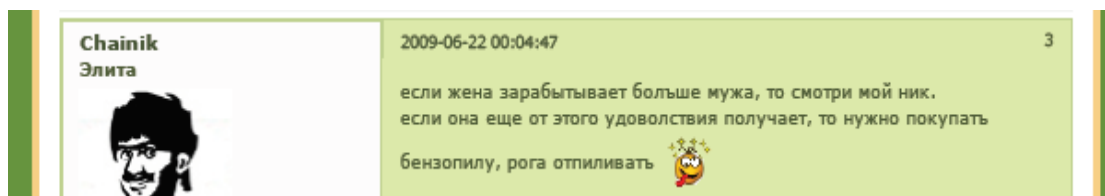


Image 128. if a wife earns more than her husband, then see my nick. / If she's also enjoying it, then one should get / a chainsaw to cut their horns off

Chainik positions himself as a moral authority by taking a deontic judgemental stance towards the relationship between husbands and wives on the basis of who earns more as follows: a wife earning more implies that a husband belongs to the category of 'dummies'; a wife satisfied with such situation implies that she is being unfaithful. He exploits the concept of a natural division of population into two binary genders that are naturally predestined to fulfil specified social roles where men are

superior, and that deviation from this order is immoral. The presented situation is thus against the norm and destroys the social order: it eradicates men’s power over their wives which demoralises the women, who become unfaithful. He takes a generic stance in terms of its generality (e.g. ‘if a wife’ meaning ‘if any wife’), which makes it universally applicable. He also frames wives earning more as deviant members of the category ‘wives’, and husbands earning less as defective members of the category ‘husbands’.

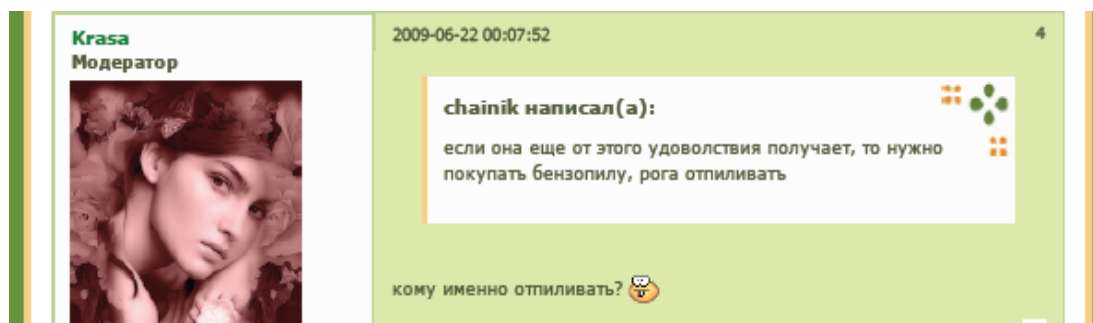


Image 129. {**chainik wrote:** / see Image 128} / **cut off whose horns precisely?**

Krasa enacts a non-understanding of *Chainik*’s argument by ‘playing dumb’ and asking for a repair by clarification. The strategy of ‘playing dumb’ may be used to prevent or reduce generating and linking negative predicates with certain categories (Sacks, 1995: 163; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2009: 353) – in this case the groups of wives and husbands that *Chainik* framed as defective.

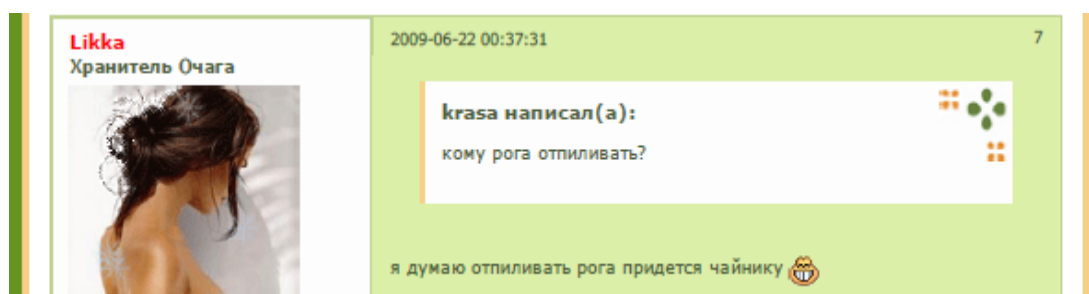


Image 130. {**krasa wrote:** / cut off whose horns?} / **I think we’re going to have to cut off chainik’s horns**

Others recognise this strategy and join. Although *Krasa* selected *Chainik* as the next speaker by directing the question to him, *Likka* follows *Krasa* by a self-selected

uptake to offer her own joking version of a repair. *Chainik* misses his turn and his role shifts from the subject to the object of the forthcoming stances (see Sacks, et al., 1974 for the organisation of conversations).

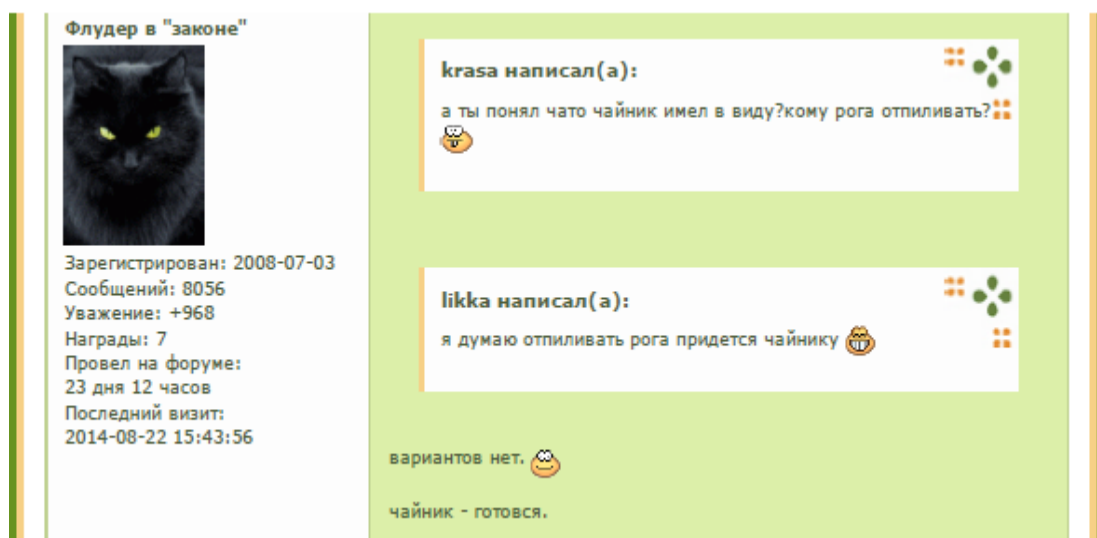


Image 131. {**krasa wrote:** / did you understand what chainik had in mind? whose horns are to be cut off?} / {**likka wrote:** / I think we're going to have to cut off chainik's horns} / there are no alternatives. / chainik – get ready.

Krasa follows *Likka* in ignoring *Chainik's* turn and directs the question to yet another participant, *Atagachi* (*Atagachi's* first quotation). *Atagachi* joins the game by aligning with *Likka* (second quotation) that they must be *Chainik's* horns. He turns to *Chainik*, however, not to bring him back as a party in the interaction, but rather to frame him as a target of a planned action, thus maintaining his status as an object rather than a subject in the interaction.



Image 132. {**krasa wrote:** / cut off whose horns precisely?} / chainik's, of course! there are no horned women, only / betrayed ones. whereas men might have horns ☺

Another participant, *Стрекоза* [strekoza], joins in and *Chainik* loses his turn again; she aligns with others by confirming that it is *Chainik* himself who is going to have his horns cut off.

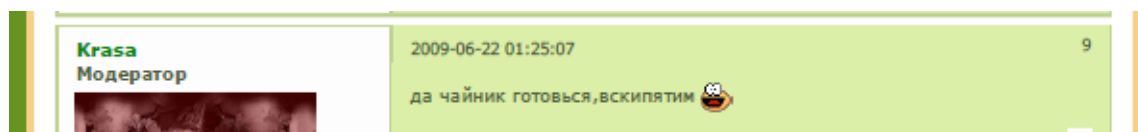


Image 133. prepare then chainik, you're getting boiled

Krasa brings up the primary meaning of *Chainik*'s username to rephrase the planned imaginary action from cutting off horns to boiling. She reframes his identity construction from moral authority to that of a 'kettle', thus making relevant a different aspect of the category *чайник* than that which *Chainik* himself chose to perform, and thus reversing the opacity of the relationship between the semantics of *Chainik*'s username and his identity.

In this conversation, rather than re-categorising, *Chainik*'s identity has been reconstructed in relation to the category *чайник* 'chainik' with the shift in terms of which understanding of this category was made relevant. His role has been reduced to the object of interaction as well as of imaginary action. His utterance has been deconstructed, with its sense distorted and twisted, and referred to selectively within a group of participants – the manipulations that *Chainik* would normally do to other people's posts. This strategy seems more efficient in hampering *Chainik*'s identity performance than challenging him openly, as this excluded him from the interaction and therefore denied him an opportunity to react.

Another tactic to reject *Chainik*'s stances is to ignore his contributions altogether, e.g. *Chainik*'s topics 'A woman behind the wheel' in the section 'Humour' received no reactions. By placing this topic in the section 'Humour', *Chainik* frames such situation as comical by itself.

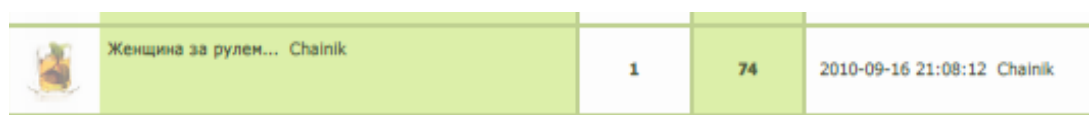


Image 134. ‘A woman behind the wheel...’ author *Chainik*, one person responded, the topic was viewed 74 times, the last response (and the only one) was written by *Chainik* himself.

This topic presents an invitation to evaluate women as drivers negatively, establishing ‘being a bad driver’ as women’s category-bound attribute. Again, this post makes a reference to the common perception of a binary gender division within populations, and that gender determines driving ability. *Chainik* frames driving females as problematic. The act of ‘stance uptake’ (Jaffe, 2009b: 8) or ‘stance follow’ (Du Bois, 2007: 161), whether aligning or disaligning, is critical in the interaction – it indicates that the stance has been recognised. Stance uptake can be performed by ‘no talk’, which might be as valid and consequential as any other reaction (Schegloff, 2001: 239–241). In this case, this topic was visited 74 times but nobody placed a comment – while ‘no reaction’ is normally a dispreferred reaction, silence might be seen as ‘relevantly not talking’ (Schegloff, 2001: 238), i.e. a meaningful action, most possibly of disalignment.

Social hierarchies work in part by constraining the kinds of stances that members of different categories can take successfully (e.g. Irvine, 2009). *Chainik* often supports his claims of authority by referring to a social age hierarchy, supported by a common perception that older people are typically granted privileged status and can successfully take a wider selection of stances. The device ‘stage of life’ is one of the fundamental ways of categorising people and is used to perform various social actions in a range of circumstances. For example, in education, it forms a base for constructing other devices, such as ‘stage of emotional development’, ‘stage of motor development’, ‘reading age’ and ‘stage of sexual development’ so that children of particular ages are expected to have attained certain levels of speech, reading, motor control, physical development, etc. (Hester, 1998: 138). *Chainik* often refers to the age hierarchy to position himself as the privileged ‘elder’. Although he never states his age explicitly, he makes his self-categorisation accountable by speaking as if he was much older than his interlocutors, for example by using age-related terms of address or referring to ‘his time’ to frame something as belonging in the past. In this way he claims a superior status over the participants that present themselves as

younger. This aspect of *Chainik*'s identity construction involves claiming the authority to speak in a certain way, for example, to patronise, instruct, reprimand, preach and lecture, or even dismiss contributions of his interlocutors on the basis of their young age. For example, *Chainik* launches a topic where he contrasts the ideas of maturity and youth (Image 135).

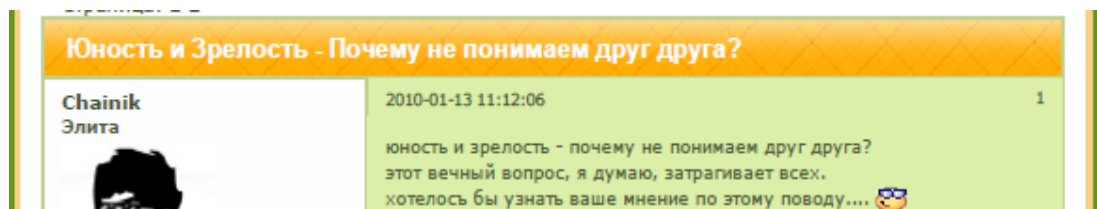


Image 135. Youth and maturity – why we don’t understand each other? / youth and maturity – why don’t we understand each other? / this everlasting question, I think, concerns everybody. / I would like to know your opinion on it....

Chainik constructs two categories, ‘young’ people and ‘mature’ people that entail certain attributes responsible for the antagonistic character of the relationship between their members. He frames this situation as being of everybody’s interest and puts it up for discussion. It can be read as an invitation to negotiate the category-bound attributes of these two membership categories to establish which qualities make them contradictory.

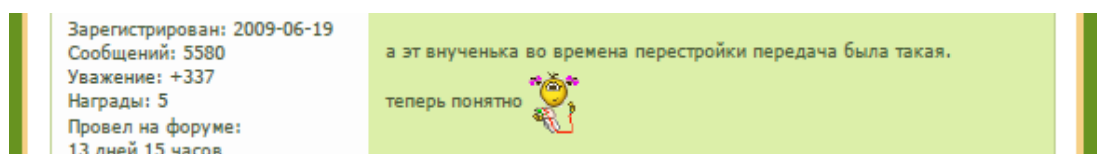


Image 136. well my dear granddaughter during perestroika there was this TV programme. / you get it now

Chainik constructs his image of someone much older and more experienced than his interlocutor by referring to the past, and also by the term of address he uses. The term ‘granddaughter’ obviously refers to age and not to familial relationships, as there has been no indication that *Chainik* and *Krasa* might be related.

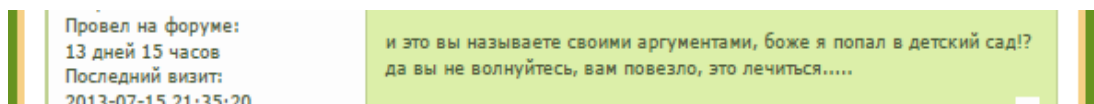


Image 137. and you're calling it your argument, my god am I in kindergarten?! / but do not worry, you're lucky, it can be cured.....

Chainik refers to the 'stage of life' device to evaluate his interlocutor's post. Children of a pre-school age are commonly perceived as unable to participate in certain types of discussions, as their abilities to reason and formulate argumentation are insufficient. *Chainik* dismisses the argumentation of his interlocutor by comparing it to one that children of pre-school age typically produce. The sarcastic tone of his post highlights the condescending character of the utterance.

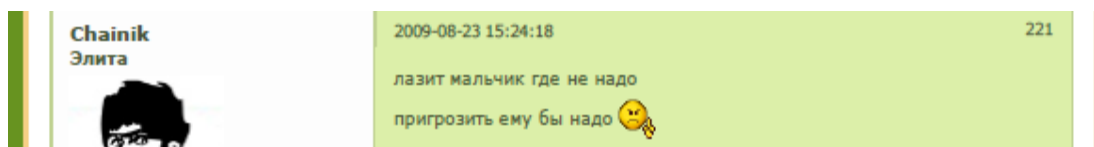


Image 138. the boy wanders where he's not allowed / he should be disciplined

Chainik frames his interlocutor as an 'unruly' boy, 'wandering where he ought not to', which can be read as patronising. He takes a deontic stance that suggests that the rights of young people should be limited. Referring to the category 'boys' is in this case understandable as making age (and not, for example, gender) relevant in establishing a hierarchical relationship.

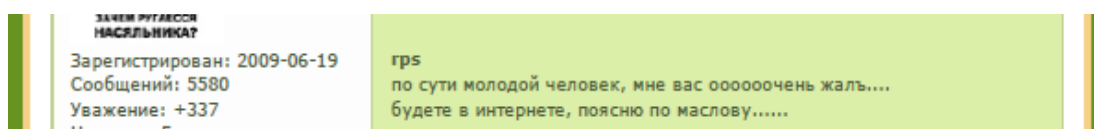


Image 139. rps / in fact young man, I feel veeeeery sorry for you... / when you're online, I'll explain by maslow...

In this post, *Chainik* uses three strategies to claim superiority and authority over his interlocutor. First, it is the term of address ('young man'), which makes age relevant in the interaction, and sounds patronising in a situation where usernames are a standard means of reference and address. Second, he claims to have authentic

knowledge, which he validates by referring to Maslow which he offers to share. This positions him as his interlocutor’s instructor, and thus superior to him. Third, using expressions of sympathy, he suggests that his interlocutor is burdened in one way or another. This comment is formulated as an affective stance but is obviously sarcastic and condescending in tone, not sympathetic.

Chainik’s attempts to claim his status by mobilising an age-based hierarchy are challenged by other participants, which occasionally results in heated discussions. In the topic: ‘Is it right that parents should choose a profession for their children?’ *Chainik* again expresses views on the function of the family. He sees ‘choosing an education and career’ for children as a privilege of the membership category ‘parent’. A number of participants, however, expressed an opposing opinion. For example, in his discussion with the user *rps* (Images 140–148), we can observe *Chainik*’s attitude to young people, in both his arguments in the discussion and his attitude to his interlocutor, who presents himself as a young male (18 at the time of discussion).

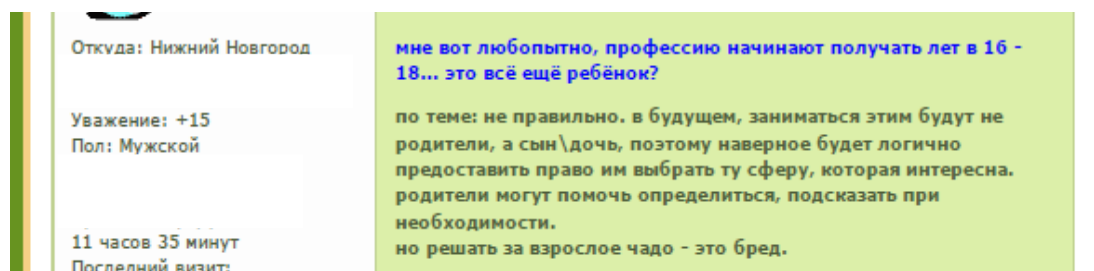


Image 140. **I wonder, when one may get qualified as early as at 16– / 18... is this person still a child?** / regarding the topic: it’s not right. in future, it won’t be / parents who will do that, but sons\daughters, therefore it will surely be logical / to give them the right to choose a field that’s of interest. / parents can help to make a decision, suggest if / necessary. / but to decide for adult offspring – it’s nonsense.

The user *rps* points out, first, that the category ‘child’ has to be clarified for the needs of the current discussion. His point is, that certain people who are members of the category ‘children’ in terms of age may at the same time be qualified workers, thus may have already gained independence from their parents. By this move, he also establishes a common ground for the interaction regarding the age group of the category ‘children’, whom this issue may concern (e.g. they are teenagers rather than

infants). He then states that it is reasonable that the right to choose a profession should be tied up with the category ‘children’, as the consequences of the choice will be theirs, and proposes that members of the category ‘parents’ retain the right to help with the decision or suggest if required. At the end, it becomes apparent that he has moved from the category ‘children’ in the collection of ‘stage of life’ to ‘children’ in the ‘family’ collection, by referring to ‘adult children’, who are no longer members of the category ‘children’ in terms of age but are still children of their parents.

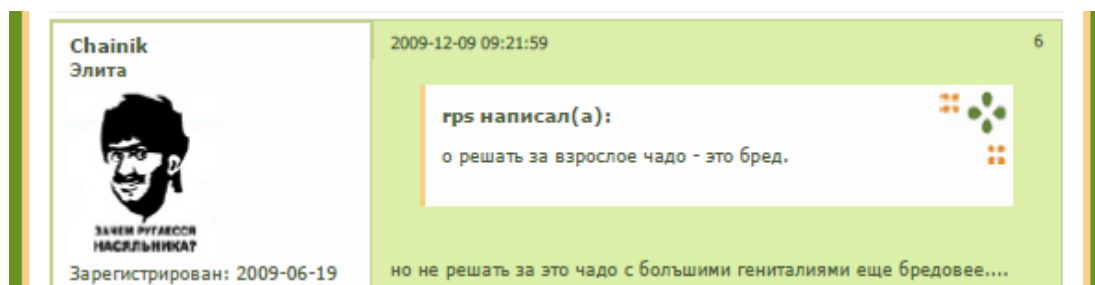


Image 141. {**rps wrote:** to decide for adult offspring – it’s nonsense.} / **but not to decide for this offspring with large genitalia is even more nonsensical....**

Chainik’s disaligns with *rps*. He argues by bringing back the relevance of the ‘stage of life’ device. He refers to one of the related devices, namely, the ‘stage of sexual development’ device (‘offspring with large genitalia’), which might be understood as saying that (due to a tendency towards a specific state of mind perceived as typical for this stage of sexual development) children within the earlier established range of ages are unable to decide responsibly about their future.

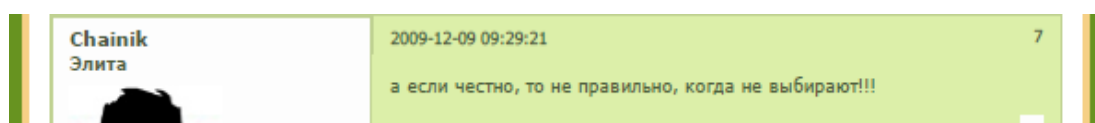


Image 142. **and to be honest, it’s not right not to choose!!!**

Chainik self-selects for the following turn (Image 142), i.e. nobody else posted anything just after his previous post (Image 141); thus, the second post was written to re-state the opinion expressed in the first. He upgrades the status of ‘selecting the profession’ as the attribute of parents from a right to an obligation.

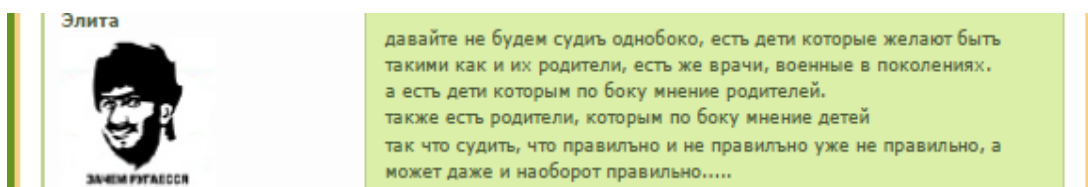


Image 143. let's not judge one-sidedly, there are children who wish to be / like their parents, there are generations of doctors, the military, aren't there. / and there are children who couldn't care less about their parents' view. / there are also parents, who couldn't care less about their children's view / so to judge, what's right or wrong is already wrong, or / perhaps quite the contrary it's right.....

In one of his further posts in the same discussion, not addressed directly to *rps*, *Chainik* changes the strategy of negotiating his stance. He attempts to validate his stance by 'restriction to population' (Pomerantz, 1986: 226), namely, he proposes it as being applicable to some families, such as those where 'children want to be like their parents', but not to others. This is a weaker claim, which might be heard as an offer of compromise, that he presents it as a more accurate and considerate account in contrast to his previous argument. He also proposes a reconsideration of the approach to the topic, which he now frames as possibly context-dependent. This may have been a reaction to the fact that, in essence, his interlocutors disagreed with him, as an attempt to generate aligning uptakes (change of strategy is a common response to a challenge, for example people may 'change what they have asserted as fact to something like an inference': Pomerantz, 1984: 615).

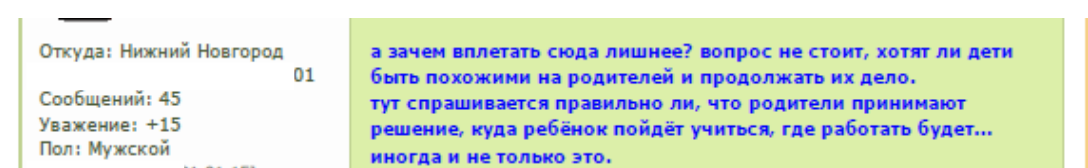


Image 144. why bring in the unnecessary? the question is not, do the children want / to be like their parents and continue their pursuit. / the question here is whether or not it is right for parents to / decide where a child will study, where he/she will work... / and sometimes not just this.

In his uptake, *rps* evaluates *Chainik*'s stance as undue by reminding him that the question is general with no reference to specific family circumstances; it explicitly

related to the parents' rights to choose professions for their children, and perceptibly also to the power of parents to make decisions for their children in general.

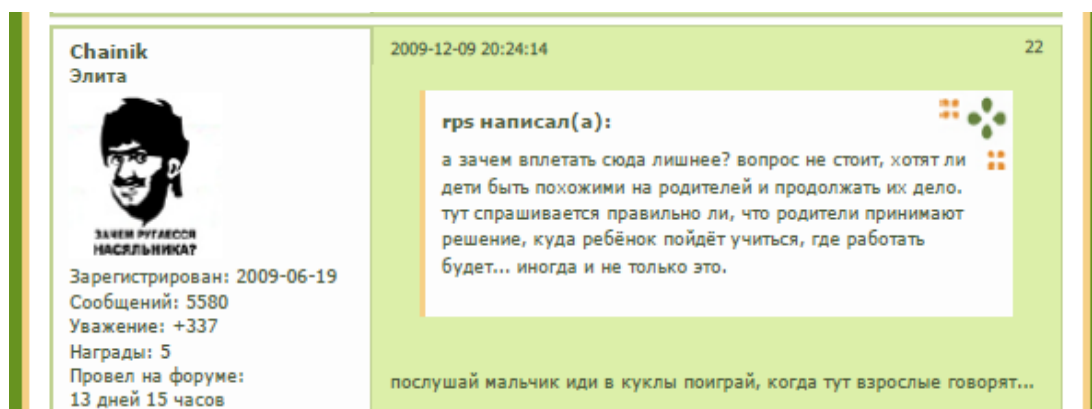


Image 145. { **rps wrote:** / see Image 144 } / **listen boy go play with your dolls, when adults are talking...**

In response, *Chainik* attempts to map the age-based hierarchy onto the current interactants. By categorising *rps* as a ‘boy’ he positions himself as the superior elder. Social hierarchies impose certain normative conceptions about the rights to talk, such as the fact that children are not allowed to disturb adults when they talk. *Chainik* makes age relevant to restrict the rights of his interlocutor to take part in the discussions. He uses a silencing strategy of ordering him to play with toys to do this, which mimics what parents might say to their child, but which when uttered by a conversation partner shows a condescending attitude that might be read as offensive.

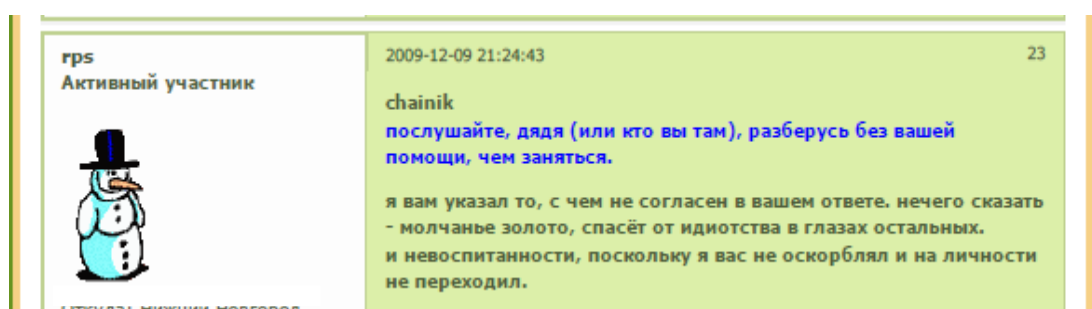


Image 146. **chainik / listen, uncle (or whoever you are), I’ll figure out without your / help what to do. / I’ve pointed out what I disagree with in your response. nothing to say / – silence is golden, saves you from looking like an idiot in others’ eyes. / and bad manners, since I didn’t offend you or / get personal.**

The user *rps* rejects *Chainik*'s authority to issue instructions in reference to this age-based hierarchy. By addressing him as 'uncle', which sarcastically mirrors the term of address *Chainik* used, he takes a stance against applying the age hierarchy in their interaction, as well as against unwanted familiarity. Using 'whoever you are' may indicate that any other hierarchy or categorisation is also irrelevant and would not give *Chainik* the authority to exclude *rps* from the discussion. He deems the content of *Chainik*'s contribution as irrelevant, inappropriate and offensive.

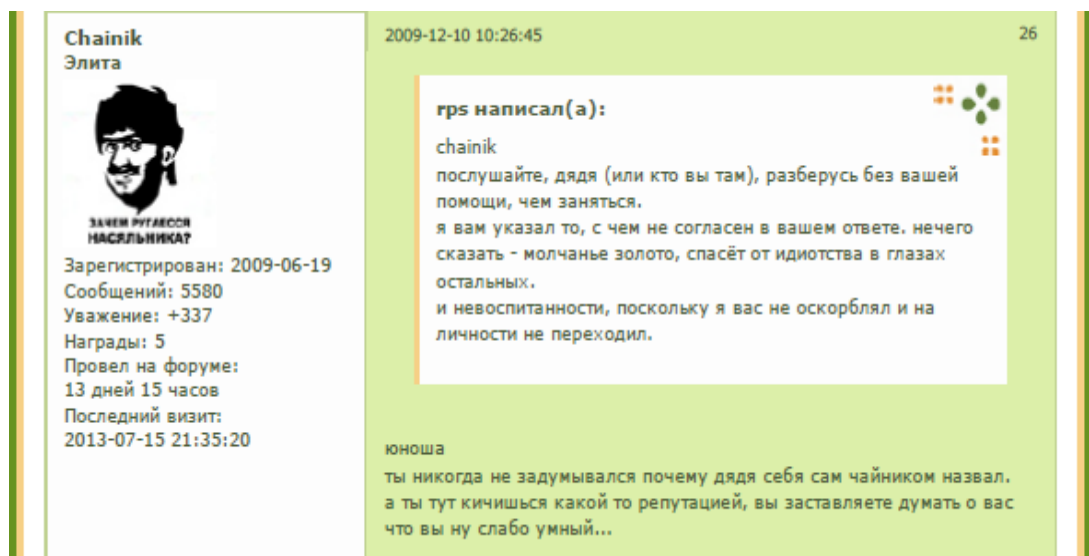


Image 147. { **rps wrote:** / see Image 146 } / lad / you never pondered why the uncle called himself chainik / and yet brag that you have some reputation, you make me think about you / that you are weak-minded...

Chainik indicates that *rps* failed to recognise *Chainik*'s category membership based on his username, which he thought was made sufficiently accountable. This way he clearly indicates that his identity is relevant to how his communication should be approached. *Chainik* maintains the relevance of age by addressing *rps* as *юноша* ('lad', 'young man') – although he weakens the effect by refraining from the associations with a child.

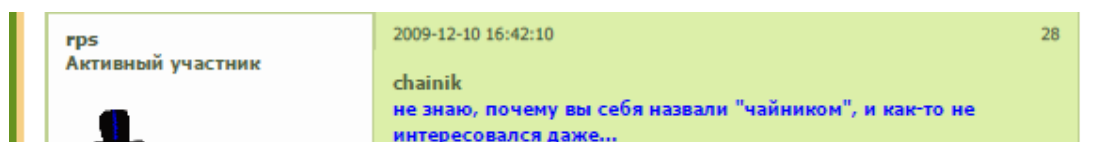


Image 148. **chainik** / **I don't know why you've called yourself "chainik", and wouldn't / even be interested...**

Still, *rps* refuses to recognise the accountability and relevance of *Chainik*'s category membership. It might be, indeed, that not all users see the username in the same way. It might also be *rps*'s continuation of disalignment with *Chainik*'s stances, expressed by refusing to recognise and validate the identity performed by him.

The last of described *Chainik*'s strategies to claim authority is by 'doing maturity' in reference to an age-based hierarchy. He uses membership categorisation to assign people to contrasting categories: children and parents, youngsters and adults, youth and mature people, and argues about the superiority of the latter over the former categories. By the activities and obligations that he ties to these categories (e.g., parents decide for their children), he frames these categories as relational and hierarchically organised. *Chainik* performs the identity of a 'mature person', for example, by referring to his life experience (such as the period of perestroika) in a way that suggests he is well into adulthood. Based on this, he negotiates his own status on the forum. His stance towards younger interlocutors often displays a patronising, authoritative character of preaching, lecturing and reprimand. This is observable in the way he addresses those interlocutors who present themselves as young, e.g. *молодой человек* 'young man', *мальчик* 'boy' and *юноша* 'lad, young man'. This behaviour constitutes a departure from the customary practice in CMC of addressing interlocutors by their usernames and draws attention to their age. He also uses age as a criterion for assessing somebody's argument, and as a justification to dismiss them ('I must be in kindergarten'; 'go play with your dolls').

Chainik's identity as a mentor and moral authority is constructed in reference to the semantics of his username as 'dummy'. This can be observed in his stances towards the objects of his evaluations, his interlocutors and himself. According to him, he named himself *Chainik* to represent his lack of knowledge; however, as he points out, this lack of knowledge was realised as a result of learning and thinking (*от познания и сознания того, что ничего то я не знаю* 'because of learning and recognition that I know nothing'). *Chainik* constructs an identity of a well-read person able to produce authentic knowledge. He refers to both secular and religious

sources, and brings up names of authorities. He also constructs his status by self-positioning, using negative other-evaluation, generalisation, stance attribution, and attempts to map his preferred normative models onto the community. He mobilises social and moral norms as his resources. Frequently, the objects of his evaluations are socio-cultural issues relevant in establishing social and moral norms. He also uses social demographics such as age, gender, nationality and religion, which he presents as homogenous categories (according to Schegloff's account, e.g. 2007a: 463, these are often Pn-adequate categories; see p. 91), as a foundation for self- and other-categorisation. He makes these categories relevant in ascribing attributes to their members. Frequently, he groups peoples' behaviours in a binary, polarised fashion, i.e. as right or wrong, desirable and undesirable, moral and immoral to downgrade certain types of identities (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2009: 353–354) and positions himself in opposition to them. He repeatedly refers to the following patterns:

- Contrasting devices: 'us' vs. 'them' (e.g. Russians vs. Americans, Orthodox vs. demons).
- Framing deviant members of a category (e.g. women who fight for their rights or who earn more than their husbands).
- Mobilising social hierarchies (e.g. age- and gender-based hierarchies).

These stance-taking acts are not only important in themselves. The strategies used to convey them are also important, as their meanings depend on their relation to other possible choices (e.g. Schegloff, 2007a: 467). *Chainik's* stances are often impersonal, as well as judgemental or prescriptive, performed in an authoritative voice that projects epistemic certainty. Occasionally his communication is reminiscent of preaching, or contains sarcasm, insult or other silencing and intimidating strategies, especially when challenged. He presents knowledge by naming renowned figures, but also identifies his personal uprightness as a source of moral authority, which does not require any additional justification.

Chainik's aspiration to the status of an authority figure encounters numerous acts of resistance, which makes this identity aspect difficult to maintain, perhaps because

different aspects of his identity seem to contradict one another. For example, it might be difficult to be preached to and take it seriously from someone who acts like a foolish flooder.

We can probably find more meanings that may be linked with the semantics of *Chainik*'s username. For example, another embodiment of a 'dummy' in association with illiteracy might be that of a 'dumb foreigner', depicting a migrant worker from Central Asia or the Caucasus. A couple of elements in *Chainik*'s identity performance may confirm this idea. Firstly, his avatar has a character and a quote from *Наша Пауа* series. Next, he frequently uses incorrect grammar, such as an incorrect case, e.g. *чай, много чай* 'tea, lots of tea' (instead of *много чая* or *чаю*), mixing singular and plural forms in the same phrase, e.g. *такое* (sing.) *ощущения* (pl.) 'such impressions', discrepancy in grammatical gender, e.g. *кнопка* (f) *маленький* (m) 'small button', and using the hard sign *ъ* instead of the soft sign *ь*, e.g. *здоровенькие, семья, больше, речь* and *рассердились*. This can be read as mocking the speech of immigrants,¹¹² and in combination with his general tendency for xenophobic stances towards foreigners, taken as a negative stance towards them. Another clue might be obtained from his stances where he engages in what can be described, in line with Jaffe (2009b: 18), as 'normative generalization' that is 'emanating from the collectivity and its shared values'. Namely, he often brings up Christianity to support his position as a source of shared values. It looks like he considers it an undeniable shared source of indisputable knowledge and an eternal ethical system. He also mentions 'early Slavs' as proper Russian antecedents. Therefore, he assumes that all his interlocutors share his beliefs, ignoring the fact that Islam, Judaism and Buddhism are also traditionally components of Russian culture and there may be members of these communities on the forum. This may suggest that he represents ethnic chauvinism and advocates religious and cultural segregation.

¹¹² Such phenomenon may be described as grammar 'crossing'. 'Crossing' is explained as a deliberate stylisation to employ associations between certain speech styles and identities for individuals' stancetaking purposes. Examples of crossing are 'when non-Asian teenagers use bits of Panjabi with teachers' or when 'white male high school students adopt elements of African American speech styles' (Jaffe, 2009b: 16-17). However, my concern is that it seems to presuppose the existence of some initial 'true' identity, which, firstly, may be associated with an essentialist approach to identity in general, and, in particular would be difficult to apply in the CMC.

However, this does not take us beyond speculations. While *Chainik* repeatedly expresses his opinion about Americans as well as concerns about Western influences on Russian society and culture, he never, explicitly or implicitly, seems to have made any statement about migrant workers from the East. It is also difficult to assess whether his ungrammatical Russian is deliberate (for example, his usage of a hard sign in place of soft is so common that it looks like a genuine error), and whether it represents a parody of foreigners, illiteracy of a ‘dummy’ in general, a mannerism of writing common in CMC, or careless typing. Thus, his position on this issue remains unclear. In any case, one of the advantages of CA as a methodological approach is that the analysed data is available to the reader and, as Schegloff (1988: 104) explains, enables ‘the possibility of independent competitive reanalysis’ – although the data may include ‘materials on independent problems’ and ‘unsolved puzzles’.

In general, *Chainik* has managed to construct a durable and recognisable identity, and his identity is perceived as linked to his username. The impression of the durability and recognisability of *Chainik*’s identity is co-constructed by his interlocutors. For example, his status as a regular, appreciated participant is evident in birthday greetings addressed to him. This custom indicates familiarity between the parties and is commonly seen as showing friendliness and consideration to the addressee. Additionally, a diminutive form of address (*чайничек*) is used to express familiarity and affection (Images 149-151).

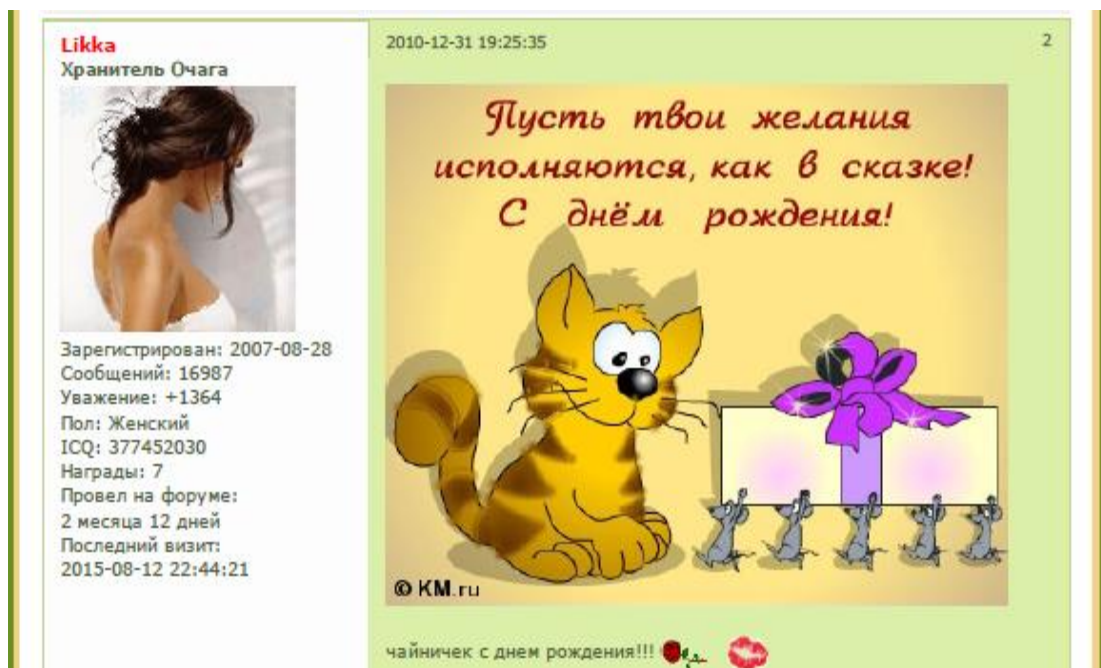


Image 149. little chainik, happy birthday!

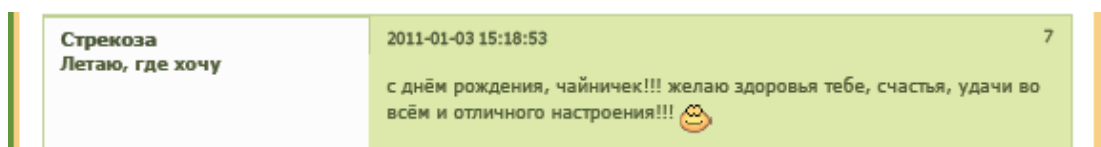


Image 150. happy birthday, little chainik! I wish you good health, happiness, every success / and high spirits!

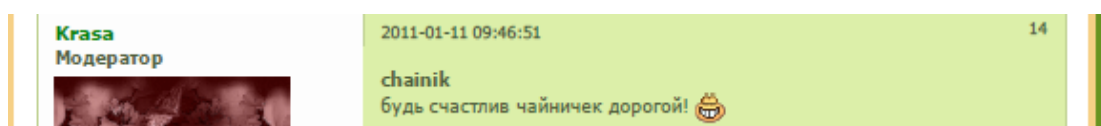


Image 151. **chainik** / be happy dear little chainik!

There are other numerous instances where *Chainik*'s interlocutors express their acceptance of him as a community member, and indicate that not just his presence but also his wellbeing is of concern to them (e.g. Images 152-154).

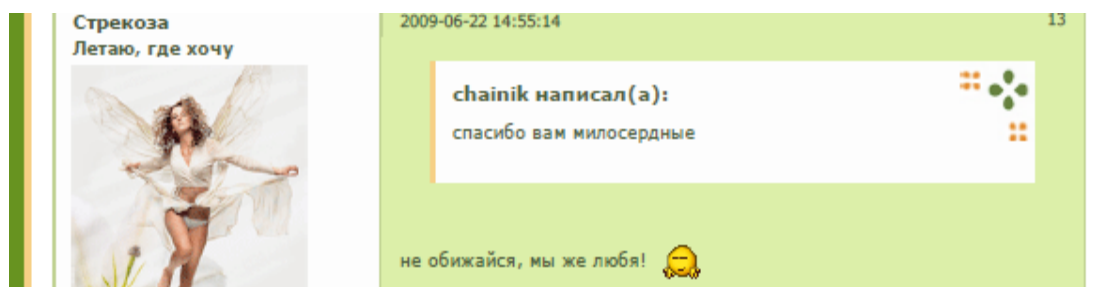


Image 152. {chainik wrote: / thank you the merciful} / don't feel offended, it's all lovingly!

This post (Image 152) expresses a warm and affectionate attitude and shows consideration for *Chainik's* feelings by offering justification and compensation for statements that he may have not appreciated.

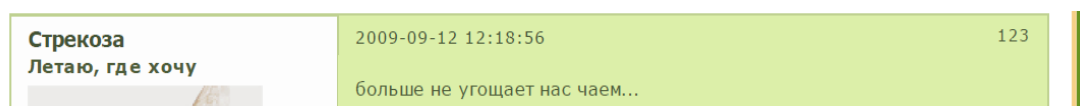


Image 153. no longer serves tea to us...

By invoking the previous behaviour of *Chainik*, and noticing the inconsistency, the post shown by Image 153 indicates and contributes to constructing continuity of his identity. Reference to tea links this identity with his username. It also indicates attachment to certain activities performed by *Chainik* on the forum.

Chainik is not just recognised as a regular participant of the forum, and accepted as a community member, but also that he has managed to develop close relationships with some users and to make himself noticeable. His username as a strategy of managing accountability for his stances helped him to mitigate problematic views or risky behaviours.

4.3. Summary

Chainik's username plays an important role in constructing the recognisability of his identity and its coherence. His identity is recognised, constructed and co-constructed in relation to a set of characteristics that can be associated with the semantics of his username in various ways. Additionally, by repeatedly spelling it in Cyrillic, *чайник*

rather than ‘Chainik’ (which is how his username is displayed in his profile), he and his interlocutors blur the boundary between the proper name and a common noun. This may indicate that the interlocutors are constantly aware of its semantics, and confirms that etymologically transparent usernames may work similarly to non-onomastic terms of membership categorisation.

Chainik constructs his identity taking stances towards the issues discussed in the topics as well as towards himself, newcomers and other individual interlocutors, the forum and the community, and his username itself. His identity is co-constructed by others who take stances towards him, his posts and his username. To construct his identity, *Chainik* activates various qualities of the category ‘dummy’ as well as associations with the primary meaning of the term ‘teapot/kettle’. The process of constructing his identity can also be observed in the stances whose relation to his username is not explicitly articulated. The username seems to constitute a binding element of all manifestations of the identity.

Chainik’s identity construction and co-construction is best observed as series of behaviours that can be seen as related with each other, and are perceived and reacted to as such. This creates an impression of the durability, consistency and predictability of certain aspects of his identity. It confirms that ‘no stance stands alone’ (Du Bois, 2007: 158) and should be analysed in the context of other stances. But it also demonstrates that the history of a stance does not have to be limited to a single interaction, as explained by the examples from Damari (2010), Johnstone (2009) and Honan et al. (2000) (pp. 219-221) – it may also manifest itself in the form of an ‘individual’s repertoire of stancetaking patterns’ (Johnstone, 2009: 42), which can be observed across a number of interactions in which the individual takes part. When we examine stances taken by *Chainik* across a number of conversations and in relation to his other stances, we can observe a series of recurrent behaviours that build up into consistent techniques of identity performance that can be identified by certain types of recurrent meaningful elements in his communication.

Firstly, there are numerous playful references to the primary meaning of the word *чайник* [chainik], ‘teapot; kettle’. *Chainik* often turns to anthropomorphism. Namely, he presents himself as if he were a teapot or a kettle and performed the actions that

he describes (of making and serving tea, boiling), and his interlocutors do the same as well ('I'll hit you on the lid', 'you get polished constantly', 'we're getting you boiled'). As a teapot, he situates himself as a social centre of the forum, just like a teapot on the table, an image he occasionally supports by relevant pictures of cakes, samovars, teapots and cups of tea that constitute a visual contribution to his portrait as warm and friendly. A teapot serves as a requisite for *Chainik* to play a role of a host and a representative figure of the forum. This might be seen as a strategy to attract attention: meeting newcomers and offering tea makes him memorable. This way he also works as an icebreaker (offline an act of offering tea may play a similar role), constructs a warm and friendly atmosphere, and makes newcomers feel welcome. Such activity contributes to the character of the forum as a welcoming and participant-friendly place, but also puts him at the centre of attention. Typically, the approached users enthusiastically co-construct *Chainik*'s identity by their reactions to his performance, e.g. by evaluating the imagined tea that they have just been served, or by commenting on the *Chainik*'s username. *Chainik*'s identity constructed in reference to the primary sense of the word чайник is as a sociable, outgoing person with a sense of humour, jovial, a life and soul of the party. We can say that he uses the semantics of his username to be at the centre of attention as well as to claim a right to represent the community and to speak on behalf of the group; in general, we can observe that his performance is accepted.

To construct his identity, *Chainik* also refers to the term чайник as standing for a membership category 'dummy'. Firstly, he plays a novice on the Internet as well as an opponent of mobile phones. He seems generally reluctant to engage with modern technology, which he perceives as preventing people from communicating in traditional ways and therefore having a destructive effect on social bonds ('it's better to chat with people face-to-face'). In this area, he sets himself apart from other users who have expressed contrasting stances of appreciation of mobile phones or strive to present themselves as competent users of the Internet. In this way he generates much attention, to the extent that a topic was launched specifically dedicated to educating him within this field. Reactions of his interlocutors show that they accept *Chainik*'s identity as an Internet 'dummy': they try to help him to become a skilled user, but

occasionally also take opportunities to tease him. Referring to this aspect of the semantics of his username, *Chainik* may seek to secure himself special treatment.

Another way that *Chainik* brings up the semantics of his username by is referring to its secondary meaning as denoting an unintelligent person. He enacts this aspect of his identity by ‘misunderstanding’ posts of his interlocutors, making irrelevant comments, placing absurd statements, and composing poems characterised by nonsensical content and naïve rhymes. As a result, he often delinks from other users by breaking rules of holding onto the topic of the current discussion and by disturbing the flow of communication. This activity has been assessed as flooding and has met with varied reactions. On the one hand, there appeared a suspicion that he does not realise what flooding is due to his ignorance in the field of CMC. On the other hand, interlocutors recognise that he acts deliberately, particularly to show wit and a sense of humour, to provoke, and to attract attention. Occasionally his conduct is evaluated as immature. It also generates numerous messages from the administration, some of them expressing annoyance or even anger. However, the most serious punishment that has been applied was removing *Chainik*’s posts. In this case, *Chainik* may be using the semantics of his username to claim the right to play a fool without consequences (e.g. of formal removal from the forum or social exclusion). It may also be working as a joker’s suit, suggesting that his foolishness is just a mask, and his contributions may convey some hidden meanings.

The next understanding of the term *чайник* used by *Chainik* to construct his identity is that of a person who is ignorant in some field or in general. However, this reference might be perceived as opaque. On the one side, *Chainik* declares a lack of knowledge and refers to external sources, especially to renowned referents from various scholarly fields and to religion, to support his viewpoints and make his statements seem more difficult to question. On the other, this gives an impression of self-presentation as an educated and sophisticated person who uses his knowledge thoughtfully. This can be confirmed by his attempts to present himself as an authority regarding numerous socio-cultural, political and philosophical issues, which can be observed in the way he discusses them.

Chainik repeatedly communicates in an authoritative tone reminiscent of preaching, often in the form of absolute, unmitigated assertions. He tends to generalise – he frequently presents his own opinions as facts and unverified beliefs as universal undisputable truths and makes attempts to establish them as norms. He highlights the certainty of relationships between some phenomena (e.g. between the examination system and intellectual capacity of the population), characteristics and obligations of some membership categories (Americans are dumb, parents should choose professions for their children, Christians should not celebrate Halloween), desirability of some qualities in members of certain categories (women should not fight for their rights or earn more than their husbands), etc. His evaluations often involve comparison and contrast as well as judgement and disapproval; he frequently depicts persons, behaviours, events, phenomena, ideas, etc. as simplified and polarised, as good or bad, and as normal or abnormal. His posts may contain offensive vocabulary as well as irony as a means of criticism. He does not seem to be careful about wording, style, syntax, grammar or punctuation, which may give an impression that his statements are spontaneous rather than carefully composed; also, their expressive tone, which manifests itself, for example, in colloquial language, multiple exclamation marks and emoticons, shows engagement and emotionality, or the intention of appealing to emotions of others. He also seems to be looking to base his authority on approval and solidarity from his audience; namely, he creates rapport by referring to what he sees as shared values.

Chainik presents himself as anti-American and religious (Orthodox Christian) with traditional views on family life. This seems in line with the current state's dominant standpoint, however, he also criticises recent policies such as changes to the state examination system. It seems that in general his sentiments lie with the past and he approaches any changes as undesirable by definition. Additionally, the sources he cites are international classics, none of which is Russian or concerns specifically Russian issues, which may give an impression of invoking eternal values independent from any political inclination. He also never invokes any contemporary social or political authority and even highlights his detachment from current events, for example by announcing his unfamiliarity with the new state examination system (which, however, does not prevent him from criticising it). He supports his self-

presentation as an authority by referring to age-based hierarchy. He presents himself as an experienced old-timer. He often treats interlocutors who present themselves as young in a patronising manner supported by relevant terms of address. He tends to assess the value of the posts by the age of the contributor.

In this case, the role of the semantics of *Chainik*'s username in constructing his identity as a forum authority figure might be seen as twofold. Firstly, it may, by contrast, bring out the intended sophistication of the communication and draw attention to the erudition of the communicator himself. On the other hand, *Chainik* may be using it to distance himself from, or deny responsibility for, views that appear unpopular: as a simple *чайник* he has every right to err and cannot be held accountable for it.

Nevertheless, we can observe that *Chainik*'s username plays an ongoing role in constructing his identity. He repeatedly announces the link between these two, presents his username as a perfect choice and explains the motivations behind it, and evaluates himself through the lens of his username. His interlocutors also recognise the link and repeatedly refer to it, for example to explain his behaviours. The username does not just create expectations regarding the conduct of the named; it motivates the projection of these expectations onto the behaviour and affects its perception – it works, in a way, as a lens to read the text. The name affects thus the interpretation of the text and vice versa. Additionally, during the persistent observation of recurrent patterns in *Chainik*'s communication, we can observe numerous utterances that can be clearly linked with the semantics of the username, although this is not explicitly stated. His repeated stances aggregated into perceptibly stable characteristics or enduring identities. *Chainik*'s identities of tea provider, flooder and incompetent IT user have been recognised as his constant attributes.

References to the semantics of his username are also observable when *Chainik* claims or is classed in the relational categories. As a teapot, he plays a host in relation to newcomers. But also by taking on the role of representative of the forum, he allocates to others the role of ordinary participants (with no such function). In his Internet classes, he enacts his incompetence by playing the role of a student in relation to *Krasavchik*, the author of the topic and his 'official' tutor, as well as a

novice in relation to other discussion participants who presented themselves as competent users. As a flooder – he might be seen as a performer in relation to others positioned as the audience to his ‘fooling around’, rather than actual addressees of the communication. In relation to the administration of the forum, on the other hand, he is a rule-breaker who plays cat and mouse with the security to test how far they let him go. When trying to take on the role of a moral authority, he positions himself as a preacher-lecturer. He supports his efforts by referring to age-related hierarchy; namely, he expects older users to be authorised to speak before their younger interlocutors and their contributions to deserve being more valued. *Chainik* presents himself as an experienced individual; he makes references to the past, which additionally suggests advanced age, uses relevant forms of address and displays a patronising attitude towards participants to frame his interlocutor as younger and therefore inferior to him.

Not all of *Chainik*'s performances of identity have been deemed convincing; his repeated attempts to promote himself as a moral and ideological authority generated various comments and reactions but it is doubtful that they were accepted, as they were often directly or indirectly challenged. This might be because this aspect of his identity does not comply with the common ‘knowledge’ about members of the category *чайник*, which constitutes a confirmation that this username is perceived as a term of categorisation. This shows that repetition alone does just part of the job in successfully constructing the intended identity – the actions must be recognised and accepted as valid by the interlocutors.

In interaction, the participants do not just establish the meaning of the specific username *Chainik*, but also negotiate their local understanding of membership category *чайник*. We can also see that *Chainik*'s username is not a static element of the identity performance. In cooperation with his interlocutors, its understanding is constantly updated and re-defined in reference to the current communicative situation. *Chainik* has been ascribed numerous attributes, which shows how the understanding of a membership category indicated in his username is negotiated on an ongoing basis, which results in construction of a unique, complex and rich identity. Characteristics and activities ascribed to *Chainik* by others were varied and

included the flooder, Cicero of the week, the demon, the one who deliberately spreads chaos, the rubbish writer, the non-erudite, the person who speaks in riddles and the one who plays a schoolboy. These attributes, appellations and descriptions may or may not match those that he claimed for himself, such as someone who is Russian, Christian, Orthodox, Slav, would not sit with demons at one table, a provoker at heart, an uncle, not violent, never boils instantly, cannot stand mobile phones, and others. This sheds a different light on the relation between usernames and identity more generally. It has been argued that CMC participants construct schematic and stereotypical identities (e.g. Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al. 2004; Scheidt, 2001). This observation was made by an assessment of identities represented by usernames conceptualised as static and emblematic elements of identity construction whose role is, in essence, limited to creating a first impression (e.g. Stommel, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2006), based on the attributes that are generally associated with the categories evoked in usernames.

The case study in this section has demonstrated that looking into the communication between specific interactants, we can see how the usage of a username as a term of categorisation, a term of reference and a name might be customised, and plays an active and ongoing role in constructing unique, complex and multifaceted identity.

CONCLUSIONS

The present work has reached the following findings about usernames. As a class of anthroponyms, usernames share a number of characteristics with three other anthroponomastic classes: pseudonyms, nicknames and given names. However, they also retain some unique qualities. In my opinion, they should be considered a separate class, but more data should be analysed to confirm this suggestion.

Usernames are an important means of identity construction in CMC. They can be compared to terms of categorisation as they characterise people by evoking sets of attributes. Additionally, their grammatical form and typography may play a role in this process, for example by enhancing their expressiveness. The role of usernames in identity construction is of an ongoing character: participants handle them as meaningful elements of their identities and repeatedly make them (directly or indirectly) relevant in interactions. The ethnomethodological approach that recommends adopting the perspective of a language user seems suitable for researching the functioning of names in their natural environment. For example, using CA, an ethnomethodology-based research method, this work has produced reliable evidence against the hypothesis of the meaninglessness of names.

Researching usernames can certainly contribute to the process of establishing the theory of names, whose central questions, as identified by Zelinsky (2002: 244-252), Algeo (1985a: 143–144) and Coates (2006a: 7-8), have been presented in the introduction. As has been established, one of the key concerns related to definition of names, long discussed but never solved, is whether or not names have meaning (e.g. Pulgram, 1954: 49). The meaning of names might be determined by their functioning amongst their competent users, thus, by observing the actual usage of the language. It has also been demonstrated that if names have meaning, this will express itself through their effect on the identity of the named person. Thus, the objective of my work was to investigate the relationship between my selected group of names, namely usernames, and identity, as observable in their everyday use.

Having taken on a language user's perspective as a decisive factor in the function and meaning of names, attention should be paid to the fact that names are, at the

same time, universal phenomena. While meanings of names might be established locally between interacting language speakers, to look for universals of naming for the name theory, we should also observe naming patterns globally. Zelinsky (2002: 243), for example, stressed the need of comparative research covering various cultures and historical periods; the advantage of a cross-cultural approach has also been noted by Mallon et al. (2009: 342). It is partly due to the Eurocentric character of his study and focus on one specific type of names – contemporary European official names – that, in my opinion, García-Ramírez (2010) failed to convincingly address his hypothesis about the meaninglessness of names. His findings might be valid for this particular type of names but cannot be considered universally applicable. If we are determined to look for name universals, we should remember that this type of naming is not representative within worldwide naming customs and is also a comparatively recent custom. Thus it does not reflect the primary purpose or function of names (also noted by Fogler and James, 2007: 206).

This is particularly clear in the case of usernames. Although the Internet is divided into language sectors, there are no borders and geographical distance, and thus linguistic phenomena online might be transferred between environments more easily than offline. This is why I have attempted to offer as broad an approach as possible by referring to international studies on names and CMC as well as historical material to make comparisons where possible. My own data comes from a Russian-speaking environment. To my knowledge, Russian usernames have not yet been presented to English-speaking readers. In addition, there are very few works in Russian that dedicate any attention, never mind a comprehensive analysis, to usernames. In this field, much more work is needed within all language sectors and cooperation is needed amongst researchers.

When making a decision on a universally accepted term for anthroponyms on the Internet, we could consider a selection of terms that are already in use online, such as screen name or username. I find this a better solution than referring to them as nicknames or pseudonyms (unless they are officially included in one of these groups), especially given that, as highlighted before (for example, by Enninger, 1985: 244-247), application of the term ‘nickname’ to quite diverse onomastic items

in the literature has already caused some confusion. In any case, I would like to find both the terminology and definition in the onomastic dictionary promised by ICOS.

The literature-based comparison of categorial characteristics between usernames and three other anthroponomastic categories – pseudonyms, nicknames and given names – revealed both similarities and differences between offline and online naming customs, and each of the selected classes gave an opportunity to present different aspects of usernames. There are some key characteristics that make usernames resemble or differ from other names, and that define their relation to the identity of the named. Usernames are selected before joining a community. They are obligatory means of identification and customary means of reference and address in CMC – no one can participate in any online society without a username, and their choice is controlled by the regulations and administration of the specific environment. They are thus not optional or secondary as often assumed. Usernames might be pseudonymous or not, individual or collective, as long as they are unique within a specific community. They may take on a range of forms: descriptive names, conventional names, initials, anagrams, graphic signs and others. They often characterise the named and therefore categorisation is one of the research tasks performed in relation to them. The qualities and values that they refer to might be expressed directly or indirectly. They may highlight some aspects of identity while concealing others, and may serve as a means of self-presentation and self-promotion. They might be changed to mark changes in identity; also, various usernames might be selected for various online communities – similarly to using alternative forms of reference and address in different social settings. Interestingly, members of Internet communities within societies where personal names are typically ascribed by convention often choose usernames that are more reminiscent of naming patterns observable in cultures with descriptive names. This might constitute a confirmation of Akinnaso's (1981: 63) suggestion about the existence of universal principles that link practices in personal naming across cultures and historical periods. Internet personal naming seems to also confirm the observation made by Fogler and James (2007: 206) that originally, all names were descriptive and their role was to characterise the named. Perhaps in a way Internet naming constitutes an illustration of a tendency to develop descriptive naming in a newly forming naming system. This

also shows the need to depart from a Eurocentric viewpoint and switch to a multicultural and multilingual perspective.

The account of usernames as a category offered in the present work, although more in-depth than any other provided before, is certainly not complete. Perhaps there are other groups of names or types of names within these groups of usernames whose characteristics have not been covered in the present work. For example, some usernames seem particularly similar to a type of given names described as ‘wishful names’, while typography-rich usernames seem close to ‘tags’ – stylised signatures of graffiti artists. It would also be useful to observe naming patterns in various CMC modes characterised by different types of relationships between the participants. Examples are blogs, where the author is a central figure of the relationship; forums, where users typically have to register; chat-rooms, where registration is normally not required and users may enter with a different username each time; gaming, where participants may form groups that cooperate; etc. All these settings may entail different naming habits.

I have analysed my own material from an ethnomethodological viewpoint, which can be ascribed to the broadly understood field of sociolinguistics in the sense that it offers some instructions and tools to study relationships between language and social reality. This approach is characterised by a focus on the analysis of naturally occurring data and mindfulness of the perspective of the language users. To sketch the anthroponomastic landscape of the selected environment, I have used the idea of MCDs to arrange the data into groups that replaced classic taxonomy. The aim here was to shift the focus from how the names can be categorised to how they can be used to categorise people, to bring out their categorising potential. I have used CA to examine the functioning of usernames in communication, i.e. to move from potential to performance, and from speculations to hard evidence. This division into two stages of analysis enables to see the difference between the prospective and actual use and shows how the meaning of the username is activated, negotiated and re-established in the interaction.

One of the main identity aspects correlated with naming is gender. Gender is the most often indicated characteristic in names, and usernames have also been presented

as the key factor of gender revelation and assessment. This may have to do with the fact that categorisation in terms of gender is typically applied to all members of a population (as ethnomethodology describes it, gender is a Pn-adequate device). In CMC, we can encounter various forms of gender-typing names within one community, such as by semantics, by grammatical form and by using conventional names. It would be interesting to take a closer look into differences in how gender is performed through usernames in various languages. For example, with gendered nouns and adjectives it seems difficult to avoid gender-typing usernames in Russian – in my research material, usernames in English are more often gender-ambiguous.

Studies to date have typically focused on clearly gendered usernames and recorded frequent references to stereotypical models of genders. Little attention has been paid to gender-neutral and ambiguous usernames. The analysis of my own material has revealed a comparatively significant proportion of usernames that do not display gender unambiguously. Perhaps it would be a good idea to dedicate some more attention to non-gendered usernames, and how they relate to the ethnomethodological postulate that populations are perceived as strictly divided into males and females.

Gender is definitely not the only category indicated in names. In contrast to Brennen's (2000: 139-144) suggestions, usernames do generate 'associations, images, or stereotypes' and 'information about a category of people'. In general, names, or at least usernames, seem to act similarly to terms of categorisation. They characterise the named users by associations that specific terms evoke based on common ideas about them. In this way, they bring up certain images and generate certain expectations about the people they represent. In this sense, names can definitely be described as 'storage of knowledge' – just like any other categorising expressions. Similarly to what Akinnaso (1981: 58-60) wrote about Yorùbá anthroponymy, these usernames might refer to 'dominant social values, important personal concerns, and memorable events' as well as promote certain qualities and behaviours. In general, usernames are a great illustration of how the function of names accommodates both 'differentiation and categorisation' (Alford, 1987: 69) and 'individuality and connectedness' (Finch, 2008: 117), as they must be unique but also often display commonly recognisable characteristics. The function of usernames

is thus both identificatory and categorising. They enable both the system and participants to identify their interlocutors and may be used to display and assess certain features. An example of purely identificatory names might be usernames that serve only to access websites and Internet services and are not used for interaction with other users or seen by other users.

Both names and terms of categorisation may also play a role of reflecting and defining relationships with others. According to Nikonov (1974: 19-27), names are used to mark individuals' positions in social systems. Similarly, this is observable in the categorising role of usernames. The categories and characteristics they are associated with, read in reference to common ideas about them, may be considered as acts of negotiation of a place within community. This might be performed not just in reference to the lexical meaning, but also to other meaningful elements of names, such as grammatical endings, language choice and typographical elements. For example, a diminutive suffix may be associated with specific categories of people, e.g. children, while usernames with a 'smile' may be associated with 'friendliness', 'cheerfulness', etc.

In fact, all types of names, not only etymologically transparent ones, might be used as terms of categorisation as well as to negotiate relationships. At the same time, in CMC research, so far not much attention has been given to identity performance through usernames in the form of conventional names. Although there is a difference between how etymologically transparent usernames and those derived from customary personal names contribute to constructing identities, the latter should not be dismissed as an uninteresting or inefficient linguistic devices. I propose that usernames based on conventional names might activate a type of categorisation similar to variations in address and reference terms in different social situations. For example, usernames derived from informal kinds of names might generate different responses than those derived from full names.

In his definition, Pamp (1985: 111) indicates the external form and the internal content as attributes of a name. My study addresses the external aspect of usernames by illustrating in what ways typography constitutes a meaningful element of usernames. Typography may take part in construction of some aspects of identity by

playing with words, letters, phrases, fonts, scripts, punctuation and other characters up to the extent where usernames become purely visual. Offline, ‘image-conscious’ names, especially their subclass of graphonyms, seem in particular to be pseudonyms, although we may also encounter spelling alternatives and cases of non-capitalisation in customary naming, such as in *danah boyd*, who is a CMC researcher herself. In general, the typography of usernames seems underestimated as a means of identity performance in CMC research.

The shift in attention from categorising names to categorising people by their names highlights names as social phenomena. So does the fact that we are able to categorise names not because they were created to form neatly divided categories, but because they were devised to categorise people. In my own material, two main types of usernames can be distinguished: usernames derived from conventional names and characterising usernames. However, the dividing line is not always clear-cut, as some conventional names might be associated with famous referents and in this way become characterising names. In addition, some usernames, for example those that look like a sequence of random letters and/or digits, abbreviations that are difficult to decode or novel formations, are difficult to assess. Other usernames might not be easily assessable due to, for example, alterations or references to highly specialised domains.

Studying usernames may contribute an alternative perspective to the general classification of anthroponyms. For example, division of names into official and unofficial (Van Langendonck, 2007: 189) does not always seem possible, as at times it is difficult to clearly assess whether a name is official or unofficial. Additionally, whether the name is official or not does not seem to determine its characteristics in a global context (As Zelinsky, 2002: 243, has pointed out, a universally accepted classification must facilitate ‘cross-analysis among cultures, historical periods, and various name-types’). I would suggest that primary personal names (again, in reference to Van Langendonck’s (2007: 189) classification) could be those that are devised specifically for particular individuals while secondary names could be names conventionally bestowed on individuals from the pool of established names, along with inherited names. Chronologically, primary names come first (in the historical

perspective, as in everyday life there does not seem to be a reliable rule). This suggestion also takes into consideration Nikonov's (1974: 42) indication that categorisation of names should consider processes of their development.

On the other hand, the presence of retrievable information about the named or of other meaningful elements in names, as such, does not prove that this information is ever used in the communication or has any effect on the identity of the named. This has to be demonstrated by samples of actual interaction where we can observe the process of using names taking place. Thus, we need to proceed from etymological and categorising enquiry, which expresses the predisposition of the name, to its verification in actual use.

The literature to date does not typically go far beyond characteristics displayed in usernames and the first impression they generate, and does not look into whether or not usernames have a lasting effect on the identity of the named user. As online names typically precede other information about the interlocutors and function as representations of the named that accompany all their posts, such names may have a particularly strong impact on impression formation and provide a crucial cue in validating selected identities. However, to make evident their lasting effect on the process of identity construction, one has to analyse conversations amongst participants who interact repeatedly.

In my example, the forum participants, both the named and the audience, demonstrated understanding of the analysed username. This addresses Brennen's (2000: 144) concerns about distinguishing between the meaning of names for their bearers (internal meaning), who might, for various reasons, be emotionally attached to them, and their meaning for others (external meaning), for whom the same names might be merely labels that connote no meaning. Moreover, my example did not confirm Brennen's claims (2000: 143) that names are processed as nonsense words, or if processed for semantic meaning, this occurs only when they are heard for the first time. The meaning of the username in the case study did not lose its relevance during the subsequent encounters – both the named and his interlocutors oriented to semantics of this username long after they encountered it for the first time, at various points of the relationship and during many unrelated interactions with the same or

different interlocutors. Moreover, not only did the meaning of the presented username not disappear after the first encounter, but it was also negotiated and updated on an ongoing basis. We can also clearly see that without understanding the name, interlocutors would not have been able to use it effectively or, at times, follow the interaction at all. Therefore competence in handling this username required an understanding of its semantics. Also, in general it could be reckoned that lacking this ability (e.g. the inability to recognise gender in dating chat-rooms) when attributes evoked by usernames become relevant may affect the course of interaction to various extents: from impoverishing the communication to generating awkward miscommunication and to making the interlocutor feel offended. This addresses Coates's (2006b) argument against the 'translatability' of names. The analysis of *Chainik's* case makes it evident that the usage of a name may engage its meaning and the act of bestowal does not cancel this meaning – quite the opposite, as this specific username seems to have been selected with its usage in mind. Thus this shows that in contrast to what Coates (2006b: 368) asserted, proper and semantic references do not contradict each other, and there is no contrast between the bestowal and usage of names; rather, bestowal is just one of the acts of usage of a name. This example also contradicts the opinion of Mill (1882: 41) and followers that names do not require any kind of processing to be used correctly. What is more, in contrast to Mill's argument that names 'are not dependent on the continuance of any attribute of the object', it can be argued that, in fact, the continuation of the attributes of the object may actually depend on the name. Namely, if the same user re-enters the site with another username, or registers under two different usernames, they might develop completely different identities. With regard to Kripke's (1980: 106) 'causal theory', usernames show that the act of reference, or the process of establishing the referent, cannot always serve as evidence regarding the meaning of names. Firstly, in the case of usernames, we learn about the names from what is displayed in the profiles and what accompanies the posts. This knowledge is therefore acquired independently from whether or not there is a link between the name and the qualities of the named. Additionally, there are no bodies to match the names, which may require redefinition of correct and incorrect references. In this respect, usernames may be compared to 'standing pseudonyms' (pseudonyms used by a variety of different authors writing,

for example, series of novels) in the sense that the relationship between the name and the performance might be seen as the one that defines the identity, rather than the one between the name and the body. Also interesting is the matter of how to approach Kripke's (1980: 96-97) argument that the 'baptismal act' fixes the reference once and for all, as in CMC this seems to depend on the definition of the relationship between the name and the referent as well. In general, inquiry into Internet naming may place the relationship between names and identity in a new light. In the real world, once you are born, you exist whether you are named or not, even though the naming act may be viewed as a symbolic inclusion in a populace. In the virtual world, choosing a name is much less symbolically related to the existence of the entity. In essence, this study confirms the descriptivist theory of proper names (e.g. Frege, 1949 and Russell, 2010 [1918]) that one cannot use the name correctly without knowing its meaning, i.e. the description associated with this name. In fact, the understanding of 'competence' in using names could perhaps be reconsidered and assessed based on communicative compatibility and a common scope of knowledge rather than successful reference.

The example of *Chainik* has shown how categories referred to in usernames may get re-constructed locally in an individualised way to construct unique identities. This generally confirms the suggestion of cluster descriptivism (Searle, 1958; Wittgenstein, 1967) that the meaning of a name does not have to be limited to a single pre-defined description. The meanings of names, similarly to those of other terms of categorisation, may be negotiated in actual, current interactions, and in fact, any description (or a cluster of descriptions) that the speakers ascribe to the specific name may constitute the meaning of this name. We have seen how various alternative meanings of *Chainik* and characteristics associated with these meanings were used in interactions. Actually, according to Searle (1958: 172-173), names do not even function as descriptions, but as 'pegs on which to hang descriptions'. This might be a useful idea, too; we can see, for example, the stancetaking acts related to the username *Chainik* as 'hanging' the descriptions on it that accumulate in the course of its usage. But we can also see that the 'peg' itself is not meaningless and we cannot 'hang' any random description on it. Thus, contrary to Searle's claims, names are not only 'logically connected with characteristics of the object to which

they refer’, but may also ‘describe or specify characteristics of objects’. On the other hand, the study does not seem to confirm the Boethian theory that ‘proper names express essences’, if an essence is, as Platinga (1978: 132) describes, a property that is unique to a particular individual, meaning that no other entity may share this property. As a term of categorisation, the same name used by various referents may evoke similar associations based on the shared knowledge.

The case study also confirms the viewpoint presented in numerous fieldwork studies of an ethnographic and anthropologic character that names are meaningful. These works typically provide little evidence in the form of analysis of the actual use of these names. We know that there are many names that are etymologically transparent and may carry information about the named, such as nicknames and other by-names. In many cultures, customary names are descriptive; they group people into categories and are generally perceived as meaningful. There is an intuitive consideration that names are to bear meanings and are interconnected with identities, but by itself intuition does not constitute evidence. Agyekum (2006: 209) mentions that various names carry certain expectations – but gives no evidence of how these expectations operate. In their works on critical nicknames, Adams (2009: 87), Mashiri (2004: 34) and Enninger (1985: 254) seem to judge by the fact that such nicknames exist that they must bring about social control, but do not present evidence of their usage to show how this is done and what effect they actually have on the named. Akinnaso (1981: 57-58) cites the example of a father who reflected on the circumstances of his daughter’s birth represented in her name, but does not mention if the name affected the identity of the named daughter in any way. These works present potential rather than processes, and thus state hypotheses rather than offer evidence.

My work confirms that CA-based research is a relevant method to study names. García-Ramírez (2010: 12-13) was right to postulate that the meaning of names should be evidenced by analysis of their actual usage. However, the evidence he presented to support his view that names have no meaning is experiment-based, and experimental settings do not reflect the context of the actual usage of language. CA can offer hard evidence from truly unaffected user-generated data on how names are used in everyday language. It confirms that it is the language users who allocate the

meaning to their linguistic tools, and demonstrates how this is done. Looking into naturally occurring data might expose those aspects of naming practices that theoretical and experimental enquiry will not reveal. Analysing usage of names in actual interaction provides evidence that the function of names is not static or limited to reflecting or displaying identities; it demonstrates their active and creative power in identity construction. It shows that their meaning gets constructed in the course of interaction as well: it is constantly updated, negotiated and re-established. These two processes, the identity construction and the redefinition of the meaning of the name, are interrelated and inform each other.

De Stefani and Pepin (2006: 161) have stressed the importance of documentation of the use of names in everyday language, in their natural settings. They postulated that to observe that names are multifunctional rather than only referential devices, we need to analyse them not just 'in themselves' but also 'as components of bigger units, such as turns and sequences'. I could add that CMC deserves more attention as an important source of naturally occurring interactions, and, at the same time, highlight the importance of CA-based analysis in studying the role of usernames in identity construction. In fact, the potential of sociolinguistic and ethnomethodological approaches for studying names deserves wider recognition amongst onomasticians. These are currently dynamic linguistic branches. At the centre of their attention is the issue of identity, and the relationship between names and identity is evident. CA-based and related methods have the potential to highlight names as part of language and reinforce onomastics' position as a branch of linguistics, as well as maintain its tradition of interdisciplinary study. This approach addresses Algeo's (1985a: 143-144) suggestion that onomasticians should focus on names as elements of language in use, as well as on the individual use of names. I would also stress that stance is another type of conversation component that represents an analytic unit that could be used in studying the role of names in interactions. Applying the lens of stance to support CA would release the focus on the structure of the conversation and help to concentrate on other factors in the interaction – for example, on a specific individual or on a specific function of the interaction, such as identity performance. It is also worth highlighting that analysis of conversation through the lens of stance might result in a solution to the general concerns about applicability of CA to studying

identity construction, as it may address the problem of how to recognise the relevance of identities or membership categories.

My example shows that a focus on the process of constructing individual identity may prove that the influence of a name on an identity is durable and that the relevance of its semantics is lasting. In this regard, I have offered a different approach than that of Rymes (1996), who referred to Searle's (1958: 172-173) idea of pegs and did not look for references made specifically to the semantic content of selected names. Rymes demonstrates how, in different social contexts, a name acquires new meanings, but the study suggests that a name may acquire an unlimited number of meanings in the course of its usage that may or may not refer to the semantics of the name. On the contrary, *Chainik's* case study shows the active role of the semantics in the process of constructing his identity. In the case of *Chainik*, the identity is constructed in relation to and with a demonstrable link between the semantics and actions of both the named and his interlocutors; thus, his username does not play the role of a meaningless peg. While Rymes demonstrates that the meaning of the name an individual is given has two aspects – the first, initial meaning in the baptismal ceremony, after which it acquires new and varied meanings during the usage of this name – *Chainik's* case study shows that these meanings are not unrelated. The meanings accumulated diachronically are linked to the meaning at the baptism, although the references do not need to be made explicit to efficiently invoke the semantics of the name.

As Antaki and Widdicombe (1998: 2-4) have observed, identity construction might not constitute the final goal; it might be performed in order to achieve some other outcome. This can also be seen in *Chainik's* case study: he refers to the meaning of the term he uses as his username to negotiate his role within the community and to manage his local relationships. From his example, we can observe the process in which, as vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006: 5) put it, 'naming expresses as well as constitutes social relations'.

The role of this work as evidence relating to the question of the meaning of names can be presented in the frame of Silverman's (2014: 67–73) and Gobo's (2009: 204–206) outlines of generalisation from the qualitative study. A common misconception

is that qualitative research is not generalisable but, as Rodino (1997) has noted, ‘precludes generalizing conclusions’. To understand the character of generalisation in qualitative research, it should be clarified that, unlike in quantitative research, here the cases are not to be understood as individuals (i.e. a single respondent in a survey or a single subject in an experiment) but collections of certain units, and generalisation is based on identifying recurrent occurrences. Also, generalisation is based not on collections of random samples of cases but on purposefully selected cases chosen through three kinds of ‘theoretical inference’:

1. Deductive inference: a critical or deviant case is used to test the validity of an accredited theory.
2. The emblematic case: a typical case that embodies one or more key aspects of a phenomenon that can be detached from individual social practices used for generalisation by representation.
3. Comparative inference: cases representing all the possible situations are used to make generalisations similar to statistical inferences but without employing probability criteria.

In the planning of my case study, I followed the example of Garfinkel’s (1967) case study of how Agnes constructed her gender identity. As an intersexed person, she had to approach the process of the construction her own gender identity very consciously, and this enabled the mechanisms of gender construction to be made apparent. As Silverman (2014: 71) explains, extreme cases are often the richest in the relevant data; they tend to activate more mechanisms and make them more perceptible. Similarly, I selected such a vivid illustration of how a username is repeatedly made relevant in the interaction to bring out the process of constructing the meaning of this name.

First, my study clearly shows that the theory that names are meaningless is false. Falsification is a rigorous test – if one case does not fit, the tested theory or hypothesis is considered not valid and it must be revisited or rejected (Silverman, 2006: 70).

Second, it might be considered an emblematic case for etymologically transparent usernames. As has been noted (e.g. pp. 95–99, 112, 205), such usernames are often purposefully selected and generate comments related to their semantics – but it has not been demonstrated before that they play an ongoing role in the identity construction.

Finally, it could also be used to represent certain type of names in the comparative study into the manifestation of relationships between names and identity in the interaction in general. Perhaps particularly interesting would be the case of an ‘ordinary name’, i.e. the type of name that is often referred to when someone is arguing for the meaninglessness of names. It could be hypothesised that a conventional name will facilitate ‘being ordinary’, which will probably, amongst other things, be manifested by repeated non-occurrence of certain activities, such as having to spell your name continuously, having it mispronounced, being asked about or having your origins commented on – in contrast to names that look foreign or otherwise non-standard. It could also be observed in different settings how its taken-for-grantedness is context-dependent, as is the case with other terms of categorisation. For example, a conventional British name will most possibly portray a totally different identity in Great Britain than, say, in Russia. Such a study could be performed as a follow-up to the current work.

Research into Internet naming may shed new light on name study in general. What Crystal (2006: 257) presented as a commonly understood disadvantage of the research on the Internet – namely, the fast pace of change that quickly makes all research out of date – can actually be used to the onomasticians’ advantage in diachronic studies. If names in general are such an exceptional linguistic tool to observe social phenomena and change because of their flexibility and adaptability (Van Langendonck, 2007: 307-309), then if monitored in a fast-changing environment, they might be used even more efficiently as a social barometer, especially as names on the Internet may be renewed and altered even more easily. To make use of this quality of usernames, however, we need systematic data collection for reference and comparison, to observe the dynamics of change. This may constitute an aid in developing the theory of names. As Zelinsky (2002: 252)

suggests, for a comprehensive account, names need to be investigated over as many places and time periods as possible, and Algeo (1985a: 143-144) reminds us that the theory should facilitate both the synchronic and the diachronic study of names – whereas the diachronic aspect is so far missing from the study of usernames.

The Internet is unavoidably becoming a crucial research environment in linguistics and the social sciences. To stress this point again, the Internet is an incredibly rich source of onomastic data. It is impossible for the Internet reality to function without names: blogs, web pages, chat-rooms and other domains form an onomastic landscape made up of names, a map of the Internet world. Such a huge amount of data means that a huge amount of work is waiting to be done, but the good thing is that it has already started, which makes me think that the prognosis is optimistic.

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Appendix

Research ethics online (pp. 18-19)

V. Addendum 1: "Ethical Protocols" - Questions and decision-making guides for Internet research ethics.

1. From Dag Elgesem, What is Special about the Ethical Issues in Online Research?

Ethics and Information Technology, 4 (3), 195-203; available online:

<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_elgesem.html>. Used by permission.

Is there only minimal risk of harm? No → Exit

Yes

Are the integrity and the autonomy for
research subjects adequately secured? No → Exit

Yes

Is the method adequate? No → Exit

Yes

Is the knowledge produced relevant enough? No → Exit

Yes

OK?

Is there only minimal risk of harm?

Identified potential sources of harm	Explanations	Answer Yes/No
Environment	<p>In terms of the choice of environment, I have considered two factors. First, the forum I have selected offers considerable resources in terms of unrestricted access, in that it does not require registration, creating one's own profile, logging by either a permanent or temporary username or any other procedure that may be considered to represent a claim of membership or insider status. It provides participants with certain tools to manage the disclosure of information about themselves, in that they decide what information to place in their profiles. The only information required upon registration is a valid e-mail address, which is treated as confidential and is not disclosed, although users can include it in their profiles if they wish to. Then, there are spaces that are hidden from the general public, accessible only to registered users.</p> <p>Second, it is not focused around any specific topic or purpose, for example dating or a support group. Therefore, communication is not organised around any issue that might be perceived as sensitive, embarrassing or otherwise confidential¹¹³ or which participants might consider as addressed to a specific category of audience that shares a purpose or interest.</p>	Yes
The study	<p>The study does not require the processing of information that might be considered of an identifying or private character, which made it easy to eliminate content that may bring harm to the participant. It is focused solely on the construction of virtual identity in the specific context and has no interest in any aspects of people's offline</p>	Yes

¹¹³ For example, publishing discussions on intimate topics, such as psychological, medical, spiritual issues, sexual experiences, fantasy or orientation might cause shame or threats to material well-being, e.g. denial of insurance or job loss, physical harassment, etc. (Ess and AoIR, 2002: 8)

	identities, online identities in other contexts, or relationships between any of them.	
Character of information	I have only used information that was publicly available. I did not obtain any privileges that the membership grants such as the right to communicate with other users of the forum or access to areas available to registered users. Additionally, I have excluded information that might be considered as identifying or sensitive.	Yes

Are the integrity and the autonomy of research subjects adequately secured?¹¹⁴

Participants as subjects	Posts produced by participants who presented themselves as minors have not been used. I also did not use communications by participants whose usernames looked like conventional names. Information on their profiles that can identify participants in other contexts, such as identification numbers from other websites, real names, location or dates of birth, have been concealed so that such information is not distributed outside the context wherein it appeared. I have also eliminated contents related to private matters, such as describing problems experienced in	Yes
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¹¹⁴ The concept of the ‘human subject’ require some explanation, as it is an ambiguous and often critiqued notion and particularly so in relation to Internet studies. First, it might be ill-suited for non-biomedical procedures for interacting with people or where direct interaction with people is not involved at all, but, for example, where a published text is studied. Second, it seems inapplicable to many Internet-based studies. AoIR propose that it is replaced by more adequate concepts such as harm, vulnerability, personally identifiable information, and so forth. In this case, the greater the vulnerability of the community or participant, the greater the obligation on the part of the researcher to protect them. It is also important to distinguish between the question of whether one is dealing with a human subject from the question of information about individuals. For example, the intuitions are that only if information is collected directly from individuals, such as an email exchange, instant message, or an interview in a virtual world, does the research involve a person, which might be oversimplified, as the information involved might still be linked to individuals (Markham and Buchanan, 2012: 4–7). Yet another question might be whether participants in the particular environment are best understood as ‘subjects’ or as authors. If participants are best understood as subjects (e.g. in small chatrooms, MUDs or MOOs intended to provide reasonably secure domains for private exchanges), then greater obligations to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, etc., may apply than when subjects are understood as authors (e.g. in e-mail postings to large listserves and USENET groups, public webpages such as homepages or blogs, chat exchanges in publicly accessible chatrooms, etc.) (Ess and AoIR, 2002: 7). My approach was to treat the online personae as authors but also take reasonable care that the text is not linked with offline individuals.

	personal lives as well as referring to other persons.	
Participants as authors	I have not misrepresented the public images of the participants or the contents of their messages by alterations to their words and other elements of constructing online identities such as usernames ¹¹⁵ or avatars, or by interpreting their performance through mapping the agenda of a particular theory onto their communication. I have made the original content and accurate translation available for reference and independent analysis.	
Participant of focus	I have selected a user who does not present himself as a minor or as a member of any vulnerable group, such as an ethnic, religious or sexual minority. The profile of the selected participant does not contain information that could be identifying, i.e. his profile in <i>Posidelki</i> does not link him to any other context (offline or online).	Yes

Is the method adequate?

Collection	CA and MCA have long been successfully used with pre-recorded materials. I used data stored by the forum in the spaces of unrestricted access. The postings on the forum are not ephemeral (i.e. logged for a specific time, as in the chatrooms), which means I did not have to create my own records of material that users may expect to disappear after a certain amount of time. I only stored on the computer material that I found directly relevant to my study and revisited the forum's records when required. Additionally, the concept of stance enabled me to eliminate parts of conversations unrelated to my research, which also helps to avoid unnecessary distribution of irrelevant material. The methodology I used recommends using naturally	Yes
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¹¹⁵ In general, I would be sceptical about using pseudonyms to conceal the usernames. Any pseudonym selected to disguise somebody's username may be somebody else's username, which could result in falsely attributed authorship.

	occurring data if possible, unaffected by the researcher. To achieve this, I did not register, which means I could not approach participants with questions I may have composed to gather information that could be useful for my study, steer the discussion in a desired direction or use other strategies to gather information that participants may have not revealed otherwise.	
Analysis	The character of the ethnomethodological study imposes that the data is analysed from the viewpoint of participants and conducted in a descriptive, non-judgemental way. It focuses on what is being said and what meanings the interactants make apparent and comprehensible for any competent recipient. Additionally, it focuses solely on the current performance and does not involve assumptions or speculations about possible identities or behaviour of the participants in other contexts.	Yes


Is the knowledge produced relevant enough?

From the academic viewpoint	The study appeared to be appropriately designed to answer the research questions; it also constitutes a valuable contribution to the targeted field.	Yes
From the participants' viewpoint	The results do not undermine or challenge <i>Chainik's</i> own perception about the relationship between his username and his online identity. More generally, the findings do not reframe social or interactional actions, or question the competences of the interactants; instead, they are very connected and reliant on their performance.	Yes


5.2.1. Names in *Posidelki* (p. 103)

Example 1.

1.


Kalibri_N xYour secret dreamx 	2009-11-03 06:20:10 сделайте мне nanakon aka konakona <3 😊	23 0
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2.


Likka Хранитель Очага 	2009-11-03 11:29:39 kalibri_n слишком длинный ник. и не в стиле нашего форума совершенно. может другой придумаешь все же?))	25 0
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Example 2.

1.


Chainik Элита  ЗАЧЕМ РУГАЕССЯ	2009-12-20 13:49:36 начальник эт ты мне ник поменяй на деда банзая, а? в новый год, блин хочу быть дедом банзаем и его олени....	32 0
---	---	---------

2.

Likka Хранитель Очага 	2009-12-21 12:01:10 chainik оно тебе надо? может хотя бы без оленей? 🤪	36 0
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Example 3.

1.

Стрекоза Летаю, где хочу 	2009-12-20 16:01:10 chainik зачем тебе ник менять? сделай лучше себе статус "дед банзай". 😊 а то и узнавать тебя не будем..	33 0
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Example 4.

1. and 2.





<p>Krasa Модератор</p> 	<p>2010-01-18 11:55:36 45</p> <p>стрекоза написал(а): сделай нашего чайника обратно чайником.))</p> 
	<p>верните нам нашего чайника к которому мы привыкли!</p>

Example 5.

1.

<p>Amfit@dmiN ...Extraterrestrial reasoN...</p> 	<p>2011-01-20 19:21:24 47</p> <p>имя - виталий. поэтому часто витамином называют. как то это надоело, решил стать амфитаминном. а потом тема наркотиков в нике надоела, решил добавить "d" и "a" поменять на "@"</p> 
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2.

<p>nevasanni Активный участник</p>  <p>Зарегистрирован: 2010-04-29 Сообщений: 32 Уважение: +2 Провел на форуме: 7 часов 46 минут Последний визит: 2010-05-23 01:19:31</p>	<p>2010-04-30 11:58:19 496</p> <p>увы такая известная река к моему нику не имеет отношения...нева это мое имя в чате у нас в городе...от слова неверная..(ник сразу скажу не совсем однозначный....)был в моей жизни не так давно сложный период когда я перестала верить людям....в частности мужчинам и вообще в любовь. живу в улан-удэ за байкалом...тихий провинциальный городок столица бурятии. часто не могу бывать пока...но надеюсь со временем научусь</p>  <p>заходить с телефона. столько приветствий что я даже как то растерялась немного.... Свал  я поначалу могу конечно перебарщивать со смайликами...не сердитесь...просто эмоции переполняют и выразить как то хочется...хотя в жизни я человек сдержанный... </p>
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4.2.1.B. References to secondary meanings (p. 275)

Example 1.


1.

<p>Chainik Элита</p> 	<p>2009-10-27 08:35:46 15</p> <p>а мы не празднуем такие праздники тупые они как американцы</p> 
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2.

<p>DARTVENOM Мастер-Джедай</p> 	<p>2009-10-27 08:47:01 16</p> <p>chainik написал(а):</p> <p>а мы не празднуем такие праздники тупые они как американцы</p> <p>собственно поясни, при чём здесь американцы?...</p>
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3.

<p>Chainik Элита</p>  <p>ЗАЧЕМ РУГАЕМСЯ НАСЯЛЬНИКАТ?</p> <p>Зарегистрирован: 2009-06-19 Сообщений: 5580 Уважение: +337</p>	<p>2009-10-27 09:20:14 17</p> <p>dartvenom написал(а):</p> <p>собственно поясни, при чём здесь американцы?...</p> <p>так его только англо саксы празднуют не гоже нам православным с бессами за одним столом сидеть.</p>
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4.

<p>DARTVENOM Мастер-Джедай</p>  <p>Откуда: Мизантрополандия Зарегистрирован: 2009-03-09</p>	<p>2009-10-27 09:24:01 18</p> <p>chainik написал(а):</p> <p>не гоже нам православным с бессами за одним столом сидеть.</p> <p>а ты не думаешь, что каждый судит по себе?... хэллоуин один из древнейших праздников в мире... в этом празднике переплелись кельтская традиция чествования злых духов и христианская — поклонения всем святым...</p>
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5.

<p>Chainik Элита</p>  <p>ЗАЧЕМ РУГАЕМСЯ НАСЯЛЬНИКАТ?</p> <p>Зарегистрирован: 2009-06-19 Сообщений: 5580 Уважение: +337 Награды: 5</p> <p>13 дней 15 часов Последний визит: 2013-07-15 21:35:20</p>	<p>2009-10-27 09:32:59 19</p> <p>dartvenom написал(а):</p> <p>а ты не думаешь, что каждый судит по себе?</p> <p>так это и есть и наипервейшая истина. в процессе жизни мы набирая жизненный опыт судим всегда от себя. а праздник может и кельтский ток его американцы упростили до не узнаваемости, чтоб как резиновые боты подходили под любую ногу.... вывод как русский мне ближе и гоже поклоняться богу солнца ярилу.....если я интересуюсь языческой культурой древних славян...</p>
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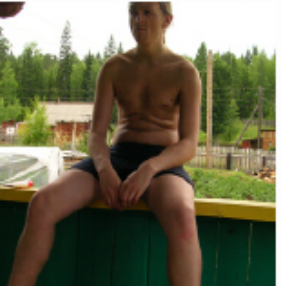
6.

<p>DARTVENOM Мастер-Джедай</p> 	<p>2009-10-27 09:34:58 20</p> <p>chainik написал(а): так это и есть и наипервейшая истина.</p> <p>значит ты бес...</p>
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7.



<p>Chainik Элита</p>  <p>ЗАЧЕМ РУГАЕССЯ НАСЯЛЬНИКА? Зарегистрирован: 2009-06-19 Сообщений: 5580</p>	<p>2009-10-27 09:37:36 21</p> <p>dartvenom написал(а): значит ты бес...</p> <p>ну я не знаю что то я не замечал бессы то они по сути буйные..... все ломают вокруг...</p>
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8.

<p>DARTVENOM Мастер-Джедай</p> 	<p>2009-10-27 09:40:12 22</p> <p>chainik написал(а): ну я не знаю что то я не замечал бессы то они по сути буйные...</p> <p>а не обязательно бесам всё ломать вокруг... они могут писать всякую ахиною... и слово "бес" пишеться с одной "с"... грамотей хренов...</p>
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9.

<p>Chainik Элита</p>  <p>ЗАЧЕМ РУГАЕССЯ НАСЯЛЬНИКА? Зарегистрирован: 2009-06-19 Сообщений: 5580 Уважение: +337 Награды: 5 Провел на форуме: 13 дней 15 часов Последний визит: 2013-07-15 21:35:20</p>	<p>2009-10-27 12:03:44 23</p> <p>dartvenom написал(а): ну я не знаю что то я не замечал бессы то они по сути буйные...а не обязательно бесам всё ломать вокруг... они могут писать всякую ахиною... и слово "бес" пишеться с одной "с"... грамотей хренов...</p> <p>приятно пообщаться с грамотеями глядишь чаго умного наберусь. а теперь серьезно, когда у человека довода нет как контраргумент, то они начинают тыкать на грамотические ошибки. да перевод одной христианской заповеди. не обижай, а то обиженным будешь.....</p>
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<p>DARTVENOM Мастер-Джедай</p> 	<p>2009-10-27 12:13:08 24</p> <p>chainik написал(а):</p> <p>когда у человека довода нет как контраргумент, то они начинают тыкать на грамматические ошибки.</p> <p>если бы ты посмотрел внимательней, то увидел бы, что "тыканье" в грамматические ошибки, всего лишь дополнение к доводу о том, что ты пишешь хрен пойми что...</p>
<p>DARTVENOM Мастер-Джедай</p> 	<p>2009-10-27 12:17:59 26</p> <p>chainik написал(а):</p> <p>да перевод одной христианской заповеди. не обижай, а то обиженным будешь...</p> <p>коверканье и неправильное истолкование христианских заповедей... думаю бог не одобрил бы это... и какой ты после этого христианин?... ты бес...</p>