

The Systematic Study of Personal Nicknames: A Small Step Forward

The Editors

The English word *nickname* derives from Middle English *eken*, Old English *eacan* 'to increase, add to' (also the source of *eke*, as in "eke out a living"). An *ekename* was an additional name, an "also name," but in time the *n* of the article attached itself to the noun, giving us a *nekename*, then a *nickname*.

By most definitions, a nickname may be a name which is added to or which replaces a real name or it may be a short or pet form of the real name. In this special issue of *Names*, we have limited the meaning to those nicknames of the first type and will not deal with short or pet forms, such as *Jim* for *James* or *Tommy* for *Thomas*. By most definitions also, nicknames may refer to people, places, or things. Here our concern is with *personal nicknames* and not with the nicknames of places (e.g., *The Tarheel State*, *The Big Apple*) or things (including such a wide variety of nicknamable objects as cars, athletic teams, or body parts).

We begin with Ted Holland's "The Many Faces of Nicknames," the most systematic, thorough, and provocative review of the literature on personal nicknames to date. Not only does he tell us what has been done—and in so doing what has not been done—but he also gives evaluations and suggests where research should be directed in the future.

In the final piece, Ed Lawson, with the dedication of a true scholar, has put together the most comprehensive annotated bibliography on personal nicknames ever compiled. He is afraid he might have left a couple of items out. We doubt it, but if he did, we forgive him. As resource references, Holland's and Lawson's contributions are worth the price of the special issue.

Three examples of empirical research on nicknames—and our theoretical article—are sandwiched between the review of the literature and the bibliography: "Teenage Granny: Portrayals of Women In Falkland Islands Nicknames," "Nicknames of Steam-Era Railroaders: A Code-Mediated Adaptation," and "Nicknames and Women Professional Baseball Players." Despite disparate titles, these three essays are connected by the authors' reliance on social science backgrounds for analysis of data. The first is couched in an anthropological style and the

latter two employ a sociological framework.

In the piece on railroaders' nicknames, Ted Holland examines the origin and meaning of the nicknames within the context of railroaders' subculture. He demonstrates how the nicknames are code mediated and have special meanings which go far beyond what an "outsider" might interpret because of the shared assumptions and common intent of the members of the railroaders' community. In this respect it is closely related to a 1985 article by one of us (Skipper) on the nicknames of coal miners, although this article did not flesh out the theoretical implications of his work as well as Holland's does.

There has been little systematic research on personal nicknames, but that devoted to women has been next to nil. The other two empirical articles included in this issue focus on women, but in quite different ways. Using qualitative approach, Maria L. Massolo speculates on the larger meaning nicknames have for women in a small, remote sheep-raising society of fewer than 2,000 people: The Falkland Islands. She discovers that males are the nicknamers and the nicknames they choose for women express their innermost feelings about the relationship between the sexes and males' role and social position in the society. In contrast, Brenda Wilson and James Skipper explore a single occupation in the United States which attracts nicknames but which is usually the exclusive domain of males: professional baseball. With a quantitative approach, they examine historical data from the All-American Girls' Baseball League, which existed from 1943 until 1954. They discover that in an environment where women have control over their interactional situations, women can be the prime nicknamers of each other and do so to about the same degree as their male counterparts. Finally, Wilson and Skipper suggest a scheme for classifying the nicknames.

Although the systematic study of personal nicknames is in its infancy, these three empirical studies are not entirely devoid of theoretical structure. We feel that the review of the literature and the bibliography represent a small, but significant step forward. We hope that this special issue of *Names* will act as a stimulus for others to pursue the subject in its many aspects and from the point of view of different disciplines.