

An Outline and Classification of Lithuanian Nicknames

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The nicknames of Lithuanian country people are investigated in order to determine the motivations for creating the nicknames and to develop a system of nickname classification based upon the motivations. More than 15,000 nicknames are included in this study and ten categories of nicknames are discussed; the category of nicknames referring to one's physical features accounts for nearly one third of all nicknames. A composite of a "typical Lithuanian" as shown by the nicknames is presented.

The purposes of this study are to investigate Lithuanian country people's motivations for creating nicknames and to create a classification system based upon these motivations.¹ The classification of nicknames is presented first, followed by discussion and examples.

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.

Most of the nicknames upon which this study is based were collected by me, with the assistance of my students of the Kaunas Humanities Department of Vilnius University, Lithuania. We surveyed the entire territory in which the Lithuanian language is spoken, including Lithuanian villages in Latvia and Byelorussia, through several score collecting expeditions in 1977-84. Additional nicknames were contributed by country school teachers in response to a questionnaire which I provided. In addition, I used the files of nicknames registered by my colleagues at the Institute of the Lithuanian Language in Vilnius. The number of nicknames investigated in 1985 is somewhat over 15,500. From 1985 until 1992 I continued to collect nicknames and these were

included in a dictionary of Lithuanian nicknames (Butkus 1995a). The total number of names in the dictionary is about 22,500.

At the outset of this report it must be pointed out that in Lithuania men are nicknamed much more frequently than women; with this group of nicknames, the ratio is about eight male nicknames for each female nickname. This difference can probably be attributed to the greater social activity of country men.

From the onomasiological point of view, i.e., in accordance with their motivation, the nicknames fall into ten categories. These categories, along with the percentage of nicknames in each category, are shown in table 1. They all refer to some aspect of the people being nicknamed; to their physical features, their kinship, etc.

Table 1. Categories of Nicknames

	%		%
Physical Features	31	Given or Family Names	5
Kinship References	18	Residence	4
Profession, Activities	16	Financial Situation	1
Speech Contents	11	Origin or Nationality	1
Temperament	8	Miscellaneous	1

The categories contain the following sub-groups (percentages are within each sub-group):

1. Physical Features	%
1.1 Outward Appearance	76
1.2 Motion	5
1.3 Speech Idiosyncracies	11
1.4 Physiological Idiosyncracies	2
2. Kinship References	
2.1 Genealogical Relationships	93
2.2 Marital Relationships	6
2.3 Marital Status	1
3. Profession and Activities	
3.1 Primary Occupation	38
3.2 Activity Preferences	33
3.3 Secondary Occupation	11
3.4 Incident Related	11
3.5 Visiting, Traveling	6

4. Speech Contents	
4.1 Characteristic Bywords	52
4.2 Forms of Address	20
4.3 Frequently-Used Phrases	13
4.4 Favorite Topics	6
4.5 Characteristic Dialect Forms	5
4.6 Favorite Songs	4
5. Temperament	
6. Given and Family Names	
6.1 Phonetic Associations	76
6.2 Semantic Associations	18
6.3 Onomastic Associations	6
7. Residence	
8. Financial Situation	
8.1 Wealthy	
8.2 Indigent	
9. Origin, Nationality	
10. Miscellaneous	

We will now consider each group in detail.

1. Physical Features

Nicknames emphasizing people's physical features fall into several subgroups: nicknames referring to one's outward appearance (76.0%), to one's motion (5.3%), to one's speech peculiarities (11.0%), to one's idiosyncracies (5.3%) or to one's physiology (2.4%).

1.1. Outward Appearance. Nicknames hinting at the configuration of a person's head make up about 45% of the nicknames referring to appearance. Such nicknames indicate the color of a person's hair or skin or another remarkable feature of the face, eyes, teeth, nose or head on the whole, such as its size or shape and, for a man, whether or not he has a beard. The other motives referring to appearance are: height (28%), frame (15%), clothing (6%), defects of arms or legs (3%), and carriage (3%).

The variety of *onyms*, i.e., words from which the nicknames are derived, is very great and they may belong to very different semantic fields. Nicknames are particularly often derived from names of animals,

such as *Voverė* 'a squirrel' (=the red-haired person), *Plekšnė* 'a plaice' (=the one-eyed person); from generic names of persons, *Dūdorius* 'a trumpeter' (=the thick-lipped person); from personal names, *Stalinis* (=the mustached man); from inanimate appellatives, *Bombonešis* 'a bomber' (=the plump woman), *Smilga* 'bent' (=the skinny person), as well as others. It is obvious that most of these nicknames are metaphors which in the majority of cases depend on the relation between realities of the same kind and not between the reality and the person. *Tertium comparationis* of such metaphors is the same distinctive feature belonging to different semantic fields. For instance, a plump person may be called by a nickname derived from the name of a reality which may be larger than the named (e.g., a bomber, a harvester-thresher) or smaller (e.g., a sausage, a spider). But all of these items are always bigger than any other items of the same kind: a harvester is bigger than a car, a sausage is bigger than any other meat product, etc. Such metaphors as a rule have no anthroponymical suffix, which is otherwise required in Lithuanian. It may be because anthroponymization usually diminishes the stylistic effect of a trope and thus the absence of an anthroponymical suffix helps to sustain the metaphor.

When it is difficult to find an item of reality for comparison (to hint, for example, at some minor peculiarity) nicknames are usually formed on the *bahuvrihi* principle, and their meanings can be paraphrased as "the one who has X" or "the one who is X." Their second element designates a part of the body or is the personal name of the owner of the nickname: *Auksadantis* < *auksas* 'gold' + *dantis* 'tooth' or *Ilgaonė* < *ilgas* 'long' + *Ona* 'such personal name' (= the person nicknamed is rather tall). About 54% of all Lithuanian compound nicknames in this corpus describe physical peculiarities, while 92% of these refer to outward appearance. (Some nicknames originate from the names of persons and are not metaphors: *Barzdočius* < *barzdočius* 'bearded'; *Rudis* < *rudis* 'red-haired'.)

1.2. Motion. Nicknames of this kind generally characterize human gait and related conditions such as bow legs, limping, or waddling. The roots of these nicknames are *Kliš-*, *Kleiv-*, *Šleiv-*, *Klib-*, *Raiš-*, *Šlub-* as in *Klišius* < *klišas* 'bandy-legged', *Kleiva* < *kleivas* 'bow-legged', *Klibza* < *klibas* 'lame, limping'. There are also compound nicknames with the second element *koja* 'leg'. Persons with unsteady gait are called by such nicknames as *Antis* 'duck' and *Pingvinas* 'penguin'.

Less than one fourth of the nicknames referring to motion describe the movements of hands, head, etc. The roots of such nicknames are of verbal origin or have originated from animate appellatives.

1.3. Speech. Nicknames in this group are based upon one of three kinds of speech peculiarities: pronunciation (67%), quality of voice (23%) and non-linguistic sounds which the nicknamed produces (10%). Defective pronunciation such as lisping, stammering or twanging, is suggested generally by nicknames originating from the more notable words which the nicknamed mispronounces. For example, in *sakė* 'he said', *s* is missed and [g] is pronounced instead of [k]; in *arkliai* 'horses', [kh] is pronounced instead of [k] and in *reiškia* 'so', [f] is pronounced instead of [š]. A large number of other nicknames in this group are also phonetically motivated. For example, the nicknames of stammerers often include the plosives [d], [k], [p] or the liquid [m] and the nicknames of lisps usually have the sibilant [š]. The stem of the nicknames of "twanging"² persons has, as a rule, the nasal [ŋ]. There are also such metaphors as *Kalakutas* 'turkey', because of the person's rapid speech, *Vokietys* 'German' (=incomprehensible speech), *Katinas* 'cat' (=talking with a twang). Metaphoric nicknames in this category have most often originated from the names of birds.

1.4. Idiosyncracies. Nearly half (48%) of the nicknames in this group refer to one's dexterity, or lack of dexterity; 17% refer to sluggishness; 11% to physical strength and 1% to physical weakness. The other nicknames relate to illnesses or indispositions or such conditions as impaired hearing, lack of intelligence or poor eyesight.

The nicknames of nimble or agile persons originate from nouns denoting small and swift animals, fast turning or fast moving mechanisms, or simply from verbs of common meaning such as 'to run'. Many nicknames of slowpokes are based on appellatives meaning 'bear', 'snail', or 'old man' and some are based on notions of sluggishness. The nicknames of strong men connote hardness: *Ažuolinis* 'oaken', *Geležinis* 'of iron' or strong creatures such as *Buliukas* 'little bull', *Meška* 'bear', *Milžinas* 'giant' or *Slibinas* 'dragon'. Weakness is usually associated with infancy: *Seilius* 'a slobberer', *Minkštabambis* (< *minkštas* 'soft' + *bamba* 'navel').

The nicknames of persons with handicaps refer to the handicap directly and do not usually have figurative meaning.

1.5. Physiological Peculiarities. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the nicknames referring to one's physiological peculiarities are linked to

verbs. Nicknames of this group are, as a rule, derogatory because of the obscene meaning of their primary verbs. These nicknames are given to persons who either cannot or will not suppress their physiological urges such as emitting gas, slobbering or the like, e.g., *Bezdukas* (< *bezdėti* 'to emit gas'), *Šlapukas* (< *šlapias* 'wet').

2. Kinship

Nicknames of this kind describe one's relationships within a family. The vast majority (93%) of these nicknames consist of patronymics or metronymics, i.e., nicknames made from the father's or (very rarely) the mother's name or nickname. There are also nicknames derived from the name or nickname of a man's wife or of his father-in-law (6%). The remaining 1% of the nicknames are based upon a person's marital status.

2.1. Genealogical Nicknames. The greatest number of patronymics occurs in Eastern and Southern Lithuania, in Aukštaitija and Dzūkija, respectively. In these areas there is also a great variety of patrosuffixes. In the west of Lithuania genealogical nicknaming is rare; slightly over 6% of genealogical nicknames are found in Žemaitija in western Lithuania while in Dzūkija this kind of nickname makes up about one third of the total number of nicknames collected in the region. In Eastern and Southern Lithuania kinship rather than physical features is the main source of nicknames. Moreover, in these regions patronymics, like other nicknames, usually replace a person's official name and surname and very often his neighbors know him only by his nickname.

Patronymics are of four kinds: derivatives (67%) such as *Adomiokas* (< *Adomas*), *Agočius* (< *Agota*), *Dūdyčia* (< *Dūda*); unchanged names or nicknames of parents (24%) such as *Adomas*, *Špokas*, *Varšavianka*; composites (6.5%), where the father's name or nickname is added to the child's name as an attribute of the latter, such as *Karoliaus Damas* 'Damas of Karolius', *Tamaškos Galia* 'Galina of Tamaška', *Kalvio Ona* 'Ona of Kalvis' (*Kalvis* 'smith'); compound patronymics (less than 1%), where the relation between the elements is the same as that of the previous group, *Adomjonis* 'Jonas, son of Adomas', *Kalviajanė* 'Janė, daughter of Kalvis'.

The number of affixes by means of which patronymics may be formed is quite large; 146 occur in this corpus and of these 121 are used to form the nicknames of sons and 25 to form the nicknames of daughters. Most of the affixes are unproductive. A great number of

patronymics is formed with the diminutive suffixes *-(')ukas* (*Adomukas*), also *-(')okas* (*Aleksandriokas*, *-elis* (*Juzelis*) and *-(')ukė* (*Šimukė*). Each of these suffixes except *-(')ukas*, has its own area of distribution.

2.2. Marital Relationship. Lithuania has a tradition of calling new members of the family by names which indicate their relationship to the head of the family. We saw this kind of naming of children in the previous section. Here we consider cases when a new member of the family comes through marriage. In Lithuania, the official surnames of married women are formed from the surnames of their husbands by adding the suffix *-ienė* or *-uvienė*. The unofficial names of married women are derived from the first names or the nicknames of their husbands by adding one of the same suffixes: *Adomienė* (< *Adomas*), *Šeškuvienė* (< *Šeškus*).

The names of husbands are derived quite differently. If a man is married to a farmer's daughter or widow, he is, as a rule, called either by his wife's or his father-in-law's name, or receives a nickname derived from the appellatives denoting a son-in-law (*preikšas*, *užkuryš*, *žentas*). The gynaeconymics are modified by the affixes *-inis*, *-inas*, *-ėnas*, *-(')ukas* and *-is*, e.g., *Uršulinis* (the wife's name *Uršulė*), *Monikėnas* (< *Monika*). There are also compound nicknames such as *Šeduikiažentis* (*Šeduikis*, the surname of his father-in-law + *žentas* 'a son-in-law').

2.3. Marital Status. Nicknames referring to one's marital status are often given to persons who are bachelors, widowers or widows, such as *Našliukas* (< *našlys* 'widower') and *Vargšelis* (< *vargšas* 'poor'), as well as to married persons who have a paramour, e.g., *Dvipatis* (< *du* 'two' + *pati* 'wife').

3. Profession, Activities

The motives for these nicknames can be divided into six groups: primary occupation or trade (38%); preference (33%); secondary occupation (11%); incident (11%); and visiting (6%).

3.1. Primary Occupation, Trade. Somewhat different from other nicknames, nicknames hinting at a person's trade are generally not based on metaphors: their appellatives denote simply persons of a particular profession or trade such as *Kalvis*, *Kavolius* 'smith', *Kriaučius* 'tailor' or *Aludaris* 'brewer'. A metaphor appears mostly when it is necessary to stress that the person is acting in the capacity of a driver, for example, or a musician, or when the nickname refers to the job.

Examples are *Smuikas* 'violin' and *Tēvas* 'father' (for the head of a collective farm).

3.2. At first sight, preference may seem to be an usual category. The roots of the nicknames indicating a person's preferences mostly designate the object of the preference, which is, finally, the object of an activity and thus the reason why nicknames of this kind have been attributed to the same group as nicknames describing a person's profession or activity. Preferences may be of two kinds: gastronomical, such as *Pupkius* (< *pupa* 'bean') or behavioral, such as *Kareivinē* (< *kareivis* 'soldier', given to a camp follower) or *Eržilas* 'stallion'. Behavioral nicknames are about twice as common as gastronomical nicknames.

3.3. Nicknames referring to a "secondary" occupation are given to pilferers, tradesmen, hunters, fishers and the like. The motivations are similar to those which refer to primary occupation or trade; however, we understand secondary occupation as a supplementary source of provisioning. It may be a hobby such as hunting or fishing, or even a criminal activity such as pilfering. Unlike brewing or shoemaking, these occupations do not require professional skills, so such nicknames form a separate group.

3.4. Incident. There are nicknames which fix some extraordinary incident in a person's life. Mostly the incident is fixed in the nickname by referring to its object or instrument: *Degtukas* 'a match' (given to the person who set a barn on fire), *Višta* 'a hen' (given to the woman on whose head a hen once alighted).

3.5. Nicknames referring to one's visiting or living in a foreign country or distant town are mostly given to persons who have been to America (50% of the nicknames), to Russia (22%), to other countries (13%), or to big towns or cities (16%). These nicknames are based on ethnonymics, e.g., *Amerikonas* 'American', *Latvis* 'Lett', or on the personal names of the owners of the nicknames pronounced in the style of the country visited, e.g., *Dženas* 'John', Lithuanian *Jonas*. There are also nicknames the roots of which are derived from placenames, e.g., *Raseičikas*, for one who lived in Russia, *Sibiriakas*, for one who lived in Siberia, or *Rygininkas* (=in Riga).

4. Speech Contents

The sources of these nicknames are the nicknamed persons' bywords; the words frequently found in their speech (52%); their

favorite forms of address (20%); the phrases frequently found in their speech (13%); their favorite topics of conversation (6%); the characteristic words of their dialect (5%); or their favorite songs (4%).

4.1. Half of the nicknames based on one's bywords are commonly known bywords. In other words, people are called by their own bywords, used intact, e.g., *Reiškia* 'so', *Supranti* 'you understand', *Klausyk* 'listen', *Broli* 'brother' (vocative).

Notably, a large number of these nicknames originated from function rather than lexical classes of words, especially from interjections and particles such as *Aga*, 'yea', *Nu*, 'well' *Ša* 'shus'. Another substantial part of these nicknames are bywords substantivized with the help of inflections, especially suffixes: *Baikis* (< *baika* 'trifle'), *Betkus* (< *bet* 'but'), *Vanius* (< *vanas* 'therefore'). One fifth of these nicknames are based on emotive vocabulary, mainly on swear words: *Perkūnas* 'thunder', *Rupūžius* (< *rupūžė* 'toad'), *Pizius* (< *pizė* 'vulva').

4.2. Nicknames derived from addresses can be divided into three groups: those based on a person's addresses to other persons (55%); those based on the addresses of others to the nicknamed person (27%); and those based on one's characteristic self reference (18%).

4.2.1. Addresses to others are either delicate and affectionate (especially the addresses of men to women) and based upon diminutive nouns denoting a brother, a berry, a bird, a cat, a chamomile and the like, or very rude, gross, or vulgar and based upon nouns denoting a bandit, a booby, a scoundrel, etc.

4.2.2. Those addressing the nicknamed are frequently members of the nicknamed's family whose endearing address may seem funny to outsiders. Usually such addresses derive from the names of loveable animals, great officials, etc.

4.2.3. Self-nicknames are based on onyms denoting a tsar, a governor, a minister, Peter the Great, and so on. These nicknames reflect the opinion of their creators of themselves, which seems rather boastful and conceited to other members of the community and they are generally ironic because the features of the celebrities do not correspond to the realistic characteristics of the nicknamed persons and such an inadequacy makes for a comic effect.

4.3.—4.6. Nicknames reflecting one's frequent word or phrase or beloved topic, or song, or nicknames derived from dialectal peculiarities

are similar to nicknames based on bywords. The difference is that nicknames based on bywords are substantivized much more frequently.

5. Temperament

It is possible to divide the wide variety of the nicknames referring to temperament into several groups of opposites: rudeness-gentleness (27%); frankness-reservedness (23%); slyness-foolishness (21%); industry-laziness (12%); joviality-sadness (8%); wastefulness-stinginess (7%); neatness-disorderliness (2%). Nicknames referring to human temperament are most often based on nouns denoting persons or animals, e.g., *Hitleris* 'Hitler', *Lapė* 'fox', *Vilkas* 'wolf'. A large number of the nicknames which connote rudeness originate, however, from the names of things which can induce pain or displeasure: a razor, an ax, a knife, a saw, a nettle, pepper.

6. Given or Family Names

This category includes associations of nicknames with the personal names of the nicknamed persons; nicknames of this kind are based upon personal names rather than the persons themselves. Such nicknames may be based on phonetic associations (76%), on semantic associations (18%) or on onomastic associations (6%).

6.1. Nicknames may appear because of phonetic similarity between a person's name and some appellative: *Kranklys* 'a raven', for one whose surname is *Krankauskas*; *Kriaušė* 'a pear', for someone named *Kriaučiūnas*; *Vosilka* 'a cornflower', for someone named *Vasiliauskas*. Some of the nicknames are abbreviations of personal names or of their etymologies.

6.2. The appellatives of the nicknames based on semantic associations have paradigmatic relations with the appellatives of the names, particularly with their synonyms: *Balanėlė* 'a spill', for the person whose surname is *Šakalys* 'a sliver' (also 'a splinter'); hyponyms, such as *Kuosa* (< *Paukštė*) 'a jackdaw, a bird'; or (rather rarely) opposites, such as *Dešinys* (*Kairys*) 'right—left', i.e., 'a left-hander'. About 8% of the appellatives of these nicknames have syntagmatic relations with the appellatives of the names, such as *Pantis* (< *Kanapė*) 'a hobble, a hemp'.

6.3. Nicknames based on onomastic associations are given to persons who have the same name or surname as some celebrity: *Hitleris*, to a man whose name is *Adolfas*, *Kipras* for one whose surname is *Petrauskas*, the same as the famous Lithuanian singer.

7. Residence

Three-fourths of the nicknames describing one's living place refer to an object which is near the farmstead: a tree, a hill, a forest, a lake, e.g., *Beržinis* 'of birch', *Kiškis* 'hare'. Of these nicknames, 16% describe the place of the nicknamed person's farmstead with respect to the village, e.g., *Pirmutinis* 'the first', *Kampinis* 'the corner'. Among these the most popular nickname is *Galinis* 'the last'. (This is also the most popular Lithuanian nickname overall.)

About 10% of the nicknames describe the peculiarities of the nicknamed person's house: *Akmeninis* 'stony', *Žagarienė* (< *žagaras* 'long switch', for the woman who lives in a shed). Four-fifths of the nicknames have an anthroponymic affix, usually *-inis*. The other nicknames are tropic.

8. Financial Condition

8.1. The rich are generally nicknamed *Bagočius* 'one of wealth' as well as nicknames originating from words denoting rich persons, celebrities, and notables: *Bajoras* 'a noble', *Buržujas* 'a bourgeois'. More rarely the appellatives of the nicknames concern monetary units and land measuring units: *Doleris* 'a dollar', *Valakas* (a land measure), *Aukso Kiaulė* 'a golden pig'. There are also compound nicknames with the first component *Didž-* 'great, big', such as *Didžvanagis*, for one whose surname is *Vanagas* and *Didžpinigis* (< *pinigas* 'money').

8.2. Nicknames of poor people have appellatives denoting indigents: *Biedniokas*, *Vargdienis*, *Vargšas*. Some of these nicknames are derogatory and humiliating: *Driskis* 'a ragamuffin', *Plikienė* (< *plikas* 'naked'). Other nicknames refer to poor living conditions or to the meager size of the farm: *Beduonis* (< *be* 'without' + *duona* 'bread'), *Buzala* (< *buzas* 'slops'), *Čvertinėlis* 'a little quarter' (for the who had only 5 hectares of land, i.e., a quarter of what used to be called *valakas*). Nicknames of this kind may also hint at a trade or nationality, such as shoemakers or Gypsies, the members of which being, as a rule, rather poor in Lithuania.

A diminutive form of one's surname may also be used in order to emphasize one's poverty. There are also ironic nicknames like *Bagočius* 'wealthy', *Dvarininkas* 'a landowner', given to the poor or dispossessed.

9. Origin, Nationality

Newcomers to Lithuania generally have nicknames referring to their

recent arrival, such as *Naujelis*, *Naujokas* (< *naujas* 'new') and *Šviežikas* (< *šviežias* 'fresh'), or to the place they came from, such as *Dzūkas*, for one who was born in *Dzūkija*, in Southern Lithuania. Nicknames describing one's ethnic origin prevail in Southeastern Lithuania. Such nicknames are linked to ethnonymics, but sometimes they are based on the personal names of other nations.

10. Miscellaneous

Rarely but occasionally nicknames reflect one's age, attitudes, the time or conditions of birth, or the like, for instance *Diedukas* 'old man' or *Vienžindis* 'only son' (< *vienas* 'one, alone' + *žįsti* 'to suck'). All these motives belong to the periphery of the motivation of Lithuanian nicknames.

There are two primary reasons for the existence of modern Lithuanian nicknames; one is onomastic and the other is psychological. For onomastic reasons nicknames appear in the communities where a great number of people have the same surname. Lithuanian countryside communities used to be quite stable. Marriage or division of parents' land by the sons spread the same surname sufficiently widely so that we can even speak, for example, of the geographical distribution of Lithuanian surnames. There are many village names derived directly from surnames. So it is natural that in such communities nicknames are used for purposes of identification.

Another reason for nicknaming is the 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. Their reaction may be expressed through derogatory nicknames and that is why nicknames can help us better understand the attitudes, tastes, customs and viewpoints of country people. Indirectly nicknames reveal to us what common country people expect of their fellow beings.

The root of a nickname contains the main information which the users want to stress concerning a particular feature of a person, so a nickname can originate from any word and from any grammatical form, even from a conjunction or an interjection.

A nickname is like a distinctive mark on its owner and this mark may be expressed in several different ways. In accordance with onomastic and semantic motivation a nickname can be ordinary when

both motivations conform (for example, in the case of the nickname of a smith: *Kalvis* 'a smith') or figurative when they differ, e.g., the nickname of the thick-lipped person *Dūdorius* 'a trumpeter'. Figurative nicknames may also derive from personal names which symbolize certain human peculiarities, such as the nicknames *Hitleris* 'the cruel one', or *Čerčilis* (< *Churchill* 'the plump man').

Motivation in nicknames as well as the possibility of their translation into other languages indicate that nicknames have their own senses. A number of figurative nicknames depend on their motives. Figurative nicknames prevail when they refer to human physical peculiarities, temperament, preferences, activity, speech contents, associations with one's personal name or surname, or to wealth or poverty. This kind of nickname denotes and connotes at the same time. Nicknames describing a person's kinship, profession, living place, or origin are mainly neutral, and their sole aim is identification. The formation of nicknames is clear when we deal with the primary roots belonging to the same, i.e., onomastic, level, such as *Adomukas* (< *Adomas*, the name of the father). In other cases the formation is less clear because it could have taken place at the appellative level, e.g., *rėkti* 'to shout', *rėksnys* 'a shouter' > *Rėksnys*, for the one with the loud voice.

The great majority of the nicknames (85%) have the form of anthroponymics or are derived from the appellatives which denote a person and another 9% are linked with animal names. In most cases nicknames originated from words denoting inanimate things or from semantically unmotivated words which stress some human physical peculiarities (especially outward appearance) as well as one's speech contents, activities and temperament.

Each group of motives discussed above presents a hierarchy; the individual motives form a pyramid with some minor motives below and a top motive above all. For instance, nicknames emphasizing one's physical features fall into several smaller groups, the largest of which is the group of nicknames characterizing a person's outward appearance; primary among these are one's facial features. Similarly, we can identify the top motive in every other nickname group. If we select the top motives we will get a very interesting mosaic, which we will call a portrait of the negative Lithuanian, as seen through his nicknames. Such a portrait will show us the features which are remarkable and perhaps even unacceptable to the members of the Lithuanian country community.

In other words, it shows us the negative side of the typical Lithuanian human being.

What does this negative Lithuanian look like? First, his physical features. (Since nicknames are overwhelmingly given to males, we will use *he* for purposes of this portrait.) His hair is black or red; he has a beard, a long black mustache, a round, dark face, only one eye, big ears, a big head, big front teeth, thick lips, a long neck, a long or hooked nose and wears glasses. He is small, plump, crooked, extraordinarily dressed, lame, with trembling hands. He speaks quickly, in a high and lisping voice.

The non-physical features of the typical Lithuanian as seen through his nicknames show him to be a smith, a former village headman who now serves as a master of church ceremonies. He is a drunkard, smokes a pipe and likes onions. He is a great philanderer, brawler, gambler, pilpherer, horse-stealer, whisky-seller, adviser and prefers an unsettled way of life. In addition he has many children, mostly daughters, has been to the United States, has studied theology but never graduated.

In his own speech he uses words like *brat* or *broli* 'brother', *reiškia* 'it means' or some swear words. He addresses women with words meaning 'berry', 'bird', and 'cat'. He refers to himself by words denoting a tsar, a minister, a major, or perhaps Peter the Great. He calls others rude, vulgar names, words denoting a bandit, a booby or a scoundrel. He has a favorite song and a favorite topic of discussion; he uses rare and strange words. His surname reminds people of an appellation; he is hot-tempered, talkative, sly, lazy, stingy and disorderly. Finally, he is rich, a fanatic Catholic and lives at the edge of a village.

Notes

1. Since this study is restricted to categories of nicknames derived solely from the Lithuanian examples and since no comparisons are made with nicknaming in other cultures, no references to other studies of nicknaming are included.

2. "Twanging" means speaking as though the speaker has a cold; it reminds one of a cat's mewling.

References

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