

Humorous elements in virtual onymic creations

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Abstract

Informal use of anthroponymy is an integral part of the lexical resource of every language. The subject of this article is issues related to media onomastics (the review concerns terminology in internet forums). The aim of the article is the material exemplification of proper names, emphasising their formal features and ways of functioning on a specific communication plane. The task is to show certain tendencies and motivations in the field of creating virtual proper names in terms of their humorous value. In accordance with the adopted research perspective and the purpose of this article, when explaining the process of creating media onyms, reference was made to the mechanisms of name-forming derivation and the theory of humour, in particular the theory of incongruity. The specific communication channel creates new opportunities for language users and is an interesting research field for onomasts because, with the development of computer technology, the terminology began to go beyond the traditionally accepted standards.

Keywords: anthroponymy, media onomastics, humour, incongruity.

1. Introduction

The unofficial part of the onymic system often derives from names that have been and still are created in a colloquial style. According to Jerzy Bartmiński, colloquial language holds a distinguished, even exceptional place in terms of national language variations because it is the variation of language that is “primarily the first to be acquired, the one we learn at home as children, and which is then sufficient for us to communicate in everyday life situations for a long time” (Bartmiński, 1993, p. 115). Navigating in virtual space and communicating through an electronic medium are one of these everyday situations. These are necessary skills in the current reality and they are influenced, among others, by the intensification of technological advances associated with the inevitable development of civilisation. This specific communication channel creates new possibilities for language users, and thus is an interesting field of research for onomasts because, with the development of computer technology, nomenclature has begun to exceed the traditionally accepted standards of language.

2. Methodological basis of the study

This article aims to include the material concerning Russian and Polish linguocultural space in the onomastic circulation. The linguocultural space is considered in terms of onomasiological basis, axiological and semiotic value. These considerations are focused, among others, on material exemplification of proper names, highlighting their formal features and ways of functioning on a specific communication platform, which is an online forum¹. Issues centred around media onomastics form the fundamental basis of this study. Moreover, this study is part of the current of research on humour, as it oscillates around the issues concerning the answer to the question about the conditions of humorous elements in virtual onymic creations. Therefore, this study aims to describe creative models that are part of a language game because of, among other things, the semantic and pragmatic value of onyms under study. Naming trends were discussed using the example of more than 2,000 units extracted from two websites, which are sports discussion forums (Polish: <https://www.sportforum.pl> and Russian: <https://forum.sportbox.ru>). This is a pilot study that aims to determine in detail the latest trends concerning humorous elements in Polish and Russian media nomenclature. The reason for choosing this topic was a noticeable lack of articles devoted to the creation of virtual proper names in terms of their humorous value. In accordance with the adopted research perspective and the purpose of this article, name derivation mechanisms and the notion of humorous competence were referred to while explaining the process of creating media onyms.

3. Virtual onymic creations - terminological arrangements

The issue of humorous creation of virtual proper names is particularly complex, starting with the determination of appropriate anthroponymic terminology (whether a proper name in cyberspace is a pseudonym, nickname, or maybe something else) to elements concerning the conditions of the ridiculousness of linguistic acts. Virtual space has its own peculiar character, the advent of the Internet has made it possible to create new, creative ways of shaping language. The starting point for these considerations is the preliminary arrangements concerning terminology and definitions of the categories analysed here, which are directly related to the issues of anthroponymic research methodology. In works on personal nomenclature, *nomina propria* referring to users communicating in virtual space are defined in various ways.

The authors of onomastic studies are not convinced that the terminology they propose fully corresponds to the nature of the new anthroponymic category, which is the proper name describing the user of computer technology (cf. Kawęcka, 2020). This can be evidenced by the postulates contained in their works that a given phenomenon requires more detailed study (Czopek-Kopciuch, 2004, p. 111). In many works in the field of mediomonastics, researchers share the stand presented by Adam Siwiec, who uses the term internet pseudonym (or net pseudonym) to describe an individual personal name functioning in virtual space (Siwiec, 2014, p. 103). The term pseudonym chosen by Siwiec is conditioned by several factors:

¹ As defined by lexicographic sources, a *forum* is, among other things, 1. “a place for public discourse”, 2. “a meeting devoted to debating matters in a specific area; also: a group of people who participate in such a meeting”, 3. “an online form of a discussion group which is used for exchanging information and views using a web browser”, 4. “an association that brings together organisations, countries or individuals based on a high degree of organisational autonomy and distinct views”, forum – PWN Dictionary of Polish [Słownik języka polskiego PWN], accessed on April 12, 2022.

- firstly, a pseudonym - is an anthroponymic category, which is most often chosen or created by the subject themselves - the bearer of the name (this fulfils the condition of self-creation mentioned for individual internet names (cf. Cieślikowa, 1998, pp. 135-136);

- secondly, a pseudonym - apart from the addressative function - can perform an identifying function, and therefore it serves to distinguish the bearer of the name among the group (similarly, e.g., in the case of social network usernames);

- thirdly, it aims to hide the true identity of the user, make it possible to choose and use an unlimited number of pseudonyms, expressiveness (Łobodzińska & Peisert, 2005, p. 167).

The terminological uncertainty is also visible in the attempts to complete the conceptual apparatus with the lexemes Internet autonym (Tomczak, 2005, p.151) and - the more commonly used - Internet nickname/nick internetowy - an abbreviation of the English nickname, a term used interchangeably with an Internet pseudonym. A detailed description of both terms and the state of research on a given issue in the literature on the subject are included in the article by the aforementioned Adam Siwiec. The terminological considerations will be complemented by the words of this researcher, who in the conclusion of his reflection on the distinctiveness of nicknames states:

There are reasons to acknowledge that a nickname as a type of a personal name is a variant or an analogue of a pseudonym, and it has certain distinctive properties that are particularly evident in connection with the communication medium. [...] I do not think that the specificity of the behaviour of the users of a given medium, allowing for the treatment of the Internet space as a social and communicative sphere with the linguistic usus adapted to it, is a sufficient reason to distinguish a new category of personal names remaining in a certain structural and functional distance to names with different categorical determinants. If we consider nicknames to be pseudonyms, then we should add that they are specific, non-traditional, and to some extent changed by internet technology.²

(Siwiec, 2014, p. 121)

For the purposes of these considerations, it has been decided for several reasons that in the article, the term *virtual onymic creation* will be used: first, we want to disregard the terminological disputes discussed here because each stand is anchored in the onomastic tradition and our aim is not to undermine any of the above-mentioned theories. Secondly, the term *creation* contains an element of creativity that is clearly visible in the structure of the units in question, and it is this element that can determine their humorous value. (cf. in the Dictionary of the Polish Language, the term *creation* as: “the act of creating something, usually a work of art; also: the product of this activity” [creation - definition, synonyms, examples of use (pwn.pl)]). In the dictionary definition, it is emphasized that the expression of an artistic creation is an original, outstanding way of playing a role, and it is this originality, the desire to distinguish oneself among the group of users/participants of virtual communication, which makes it possible to use the lexeme *creation* in relation to virtual proper names. The web user sometimes plays a different character, takes a different name, plays a role - all this may, to some extent, bring media onyms closer to artistic creations, thus making proper names not identical semantically or functionally with common words (or other, rooted in tradition, proper names), making them at the same time a diverse and extremely interesting subject for research.

² Translated by the Author.

4. Proper names in the light of linguistic humour

A problematic aspect is the identification of an appropriate linguistic device in the field of humorology (*humorologia*, a term used after Władysław Chłopicki, 1995, p. 4). As scholars have noted, the study of humour, irony and other humorous forms of expression is vitiated by definitional problems (Attardo, 2002, p. 166). According to the dictionary edited by Żmigrodzki, the term *humor* has multiple meanings: 1. “the ability to find what is funny and to make others laugh”; 2a. “the ability to find that a text or other thing entertains or makes others laugh”; 2b. “a collection of texts or passages of texts that entertain or make the recipient laugh”; 3. “a mental state that persists for some time and is marked by the prevalence of some feelings that are related to a person’s attitude to the surrounding world”; 4. “a mental state marked by the prevalence of positive feelings that are related to a person’s attitude to the surrounding world” (*humor* [humour] – Polish Academy of Sciences Great Dictionary of Polish [Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN, wsjp.pl] accessed on February 22, 2022).

In Polish, the issue of terminology is highly complicated because in many contemporary lexicographic sources, the term *humor* [humour] is accompanied by the word *ironia* [irony], which the *PWN Dictionary of Polish* [Słownik języka polskiego PWN] defines as: “derision, malice or mockery hidden in an apparently approving utterance” [<https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/ironia.html>]. Irony is often combined with humour; however, these two notions cannot always be identified with each other (the difference is that irony can express or evoke negative emotions). In the light of these considerations on virtual onyms, which are described by scholars as *self-identifiers* (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2010, p. 1), it is important to notice a certain correlation between self-presentation and self-irony, the purpose of which is to laugh at one’s own faults and create a different/worse image of oneself through the use of a certain ambiguity, wordplay or other linguistic strategies, which have an effect on creating a specific image of reality. Laughter is also closely related to irony and being an amusing person is useful in fostering a sense of acceptance or building self-esteem. Web users may use irony to interest, intrigue or distinguish themselves from other, numerous users of virtual communication.

Another term that brings difficulties in achieving a uniform definition is the word *komizm* [comic quality]. A partial similarity to the term *humor* [humour] is evidenced by its presence in the *Great Dictionary of Polish* [Wielki słownik języka polskiego] that defines *komizm* [comic quality] as 1. “a feature of a situation, person or thing that arouses amusement”; 2. “the effect achieved in an artistic work through the presentation of a character, utterance, custom or situation in such a way as to arouse amusement in the recipient” (*komizm* [comic quality] – Polish Academy of Sciences Great Dictionary of Polish [Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN, wsjp.pl] accessed on February 22, 2022). A detailed linguistic study of this notion was provided, among others, by Bohdan Dziemidok (1961). The scholar distinguished six major groups of theories: theories of a negative feature of the comical object (superiority), degradation, contrast, contradiction, deviation from the norm, and a group of theories with intersecting motives (cf. Dziemidok, 2011, pp. 12–13). In this case, the differences between lexemes in question are discussed in the study by Magdalena Lipińska who, adopting an approach to the phenomenon from the perspective of text linguistics, assumes the following conceptual scope for the terms *humor* [humour] and *komizm* [comic quality]:

the former is in a broad sense ‘the ability to notice the amusing sides of life, usually treated with forbearance and indulgence; [it also means] a cheerful mood, a merry disposition’ (Szymczak 1995: 711). In colloquial language, the meaning of the term humor [humour] has expanded to include the word ‘komizm’ [comic quality]. (...) Humour does not exist without comic quality, which is what makes humour possible. The latter always uses a sort of comic quality that is not necessarily humorous (<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humour> [accessed on November 12, 2014]).

(Lipińska, 2014, pp. 183-184)

In terms of humour, one of the most important theories of humour should be mentioned, i.e., General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) by Attardo and Raskin. This theory is an extension and replacement of Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH) and Attardo’s five-level model of joke representation. Robert Lew describes GTVH as follows: “The idea of script opposition, which is central to SSTH, is reduced in GTVH to just one of the six knowledge resources that, according to the theory, feed each humorous text and at the same time constitute the parameters of similarity between jokes. The other five resources include language, narrative strategy, target, situation, and logical mechanism” (Lew, 2000, p. 127). It should be also mentioned that Raskin understands the term *humour* quite broadly, as he treats it as a synonym for the words such as *the funny*, *the ludicrous*, *the comic*, *the laughable* (Attardo, 2002, p. 232).

In terms of the evolution of the theory of humour, Danuta Buttler in her monograph *Polski dowcip językowy* [“Polish Linguistic Humour”] identifies two periods at the same time: philosophical and interdisciplinary (cf. Buttler, 2011, p. 9). On the other hand, Dorota Brzozowska in her study *O dowcipach polskich i angielskich. Aspekty językowokulturowe* [“Polish and English Jokes – Linguistic and Cultural Aspects”] distinguishes the following three theories of humour: psychoanalytic, socio-behavioural and perceptual-cognitive, and the corresponding terms include relaxation, degradation, incongruity (Brzozowska, 2000, pp. 20-21). Due to a broad spectrum of the above-mentioned theories, a detailed analysis of all of them goes beyond the framework of proposed considerations, the scope of which is determined by the title of this article. While accepting the thesis that one of basic categories in the current research on linguistic humour is the principle of incongruity, in the following part of the text there will be focus only on the source of humour in proper names, which is conditioned by contrast/variety in their interpretation.

4.1. Virtual onyms in the light of incongruity theory³

In terms of the interpretation of proper names in the light of the nature of verbal humour, the last category in question is of particular importance. According to scholars’ findings, theories of incongruity put the cause of laughter on the basis of dissonance between what recipients expect and what they are confronted with (cf. Chłopiczki, 1995, pp. 7-15; Rutkowski, 2006, p. 398). Mariusz Rutkowski notes that “the basic type of incongruity resulting in the humorous reception of onymic units is the opposition updated in the perception of the recipient: name (lack of meaning) – appellative (meaning)” (2006, p. 402).

These types of names include internet creations whose onymic basis is motivated by commonly known appellatives:

1. Polish: Fanatyk Pawełek (Paul the fanatic), Geriatryczne CM (geriatric MC), Ksionc (mocking spelling of the word ksiądz – priest), ostra4 (sharp4), PsychologBMW (BMW psychologist), Profesor (professor), poszukiwanie (search), tractor (tractor); Russian: Jagoda - Malina⁴ (berry/blueberry – raspberry, which are Polish female names).

³ Types of incongruities in proper names are cited after M. Rutkowski (2006, pp. 400-406).

⁴ The original spelling of the names has been retained in all examples cited.

In terms of Polish and Russian internet creations, there is a considerable number of names borrowed from English:

2. Polish⁵: Chili, Cookie, Curly199, Destiny, ElectricWizard, Experience, Fox, White_Sven, YellowGirl.

A feature of online anthroponymy is also the presence of multi-element structures:

3. Polish: BEtheMonster, CiastkoKarmelCzeko (CookieCaramelChoco), ladywife; Russian: IrinaWow, prostoyou (justjyou).

These structures may sometimes take the form of sentences: lubiesecondhand (ilikesecondhand), rzrucbrzuch (loseyourbelly). Spelling peculiarities (lack of space or its multiplication, lack of capital letters according to the orthographic rules or lack of consistency in their use) make the reading of internet names very difficult, e.g., Polish: jestemnajednopytanko (iamheretoaskonequestion). The reception of this type of onyms is largely individual and depends on the recipient's predispositions because, as onomasts emphasise, the fact that these onyms are experienced as meaningful may sometimes be insufficient to interpret them in the light of humorous values. In the case of borrowings, an additional aspect of the reception/understanding of the humorous value of this type of onyms is the knowledge of foreign languages, which can significantly reduce this value (in the case of lack of knowledge of a language) or strengthen it. A greater probability of humorous interpretation can be observed in onyms that are based on colloquial and vulgar lexemes referring to specific fields of meaning and implementing the opposition: natural – marked:

4. Polish: D0ctor Anal, jelop (dumbhead), Hot Player, maladziurka (smallhole), zramolalytetryk (gagaelderlygrouch).

A different type of incongruity is present in grouped names in which a humorous effect is achieved by juxtaposing several deliberately chosen elements:

5. EUSTACHYMOTYKA (EUSTACEHOE), Edward Surowy (Edward the Strict), JestemPatrykProszek (IamPatrickPowder), zgnilyjacek (rottenjack).

This type of onymic creation usually takes the form of a first name and a surname in both languages, where especially the second element (supposedly denoting the name) contrasts in this juxtaposition and may affect the achievement of the intended humorous effect by its owner (in contrast to internet creations – the first name and the surname are usually names deprived of semantic and axiological nature).

The combination of the intended meaning with specific, mostly foreign-sounding components illustrates the incongruity: serious – frivolous:

6. derivatives: Laicik (esay-peasy), quescik (smallquest).

The cited examples implement a type of semantic and formal incongruity based on the mismatch between native morphemes and foreign-language derivational bases of names.

There is also a peculiar "mismatch" in a certain group of virtual creations, in which – instead of the expected ordinary names – onyms of a different tone appear, which can reveal the opposition trivial – important:

⁵ "Polish" means from the <https://www.sportforum.pl> website and "Russian" means from the <https://forum.sportbox.ru> website. The explanation of the names is given in brackets.

7. eurobialystok (Białystok is a city in northeastern Poland), rzeszowski speedway (Rzeszów speedway).

In this type of names, incongruity results from the combination of both elements associated with everyday location, provinciality, and lexemes connoting the meaning of otherness, foreignness.

Another type of incongruity is illustrated by theories that treat humour as a play (Brzozowska, 2000, pp. 23-24). Danuta Buttler argues that linguistic and comic phenomena exhibit duality that consists in the existence of a group of means traditionally used by a certain community: sayings, nicknames, humorous words, word-forming elements, and individual creations based on an unusual combination of linguistic elements, which break with certain conventions or refer to them in an unusual way. The scholar considers both a deliberate avoidance of traditional forms and the breaking of conventions as a linguistic joke (Buttler, 1961, p. 289).

4.2. Virtual onyms in the light of a language game

Virtual names that appear in virtual space can attract attention and stimulate imagination by their form and meaning. They can compel thought and other creative activities through their non-standard form, which is the result of a language game that largely involves conscious violation of language rules. In this light, the cited names also fit into the theory of incongruity, as they aim to produce a comic effect by violating the language rules and behaviours expected by recipients. By failing to meet the recipient's expectations, these names violate the language rules and thus can be surprising and entertaining.

Such names usually have a comic quality because of the intertextual and expressive functions of proper names, which have different sources of expressivity. It has been observed that, in the internet communication, there is a need to create

names that are intended by the sender (creator) to contain elements of humour. It is then that intentional humour appears, which already at the moment of the naming act distinguishes these units from names in which semantic humour related only to the reception of names against the background of an equal-sounding appellative manifests itself.

(Rutkowski, 2006, p. 406)

Such a deliberate transformation of the linguistic system is a mechanism intended to create humorous names. They owe their existence most often to web users making use of appropriate transformations - the so-called language games.

The term *language game*, although used by representatives of both linguistics and literary studies, has not yet been defined in any of these disciplines. This term is used to refer to different types of interaction and was introduced by L. Wittgenstein as a term for the whole consisting of language and the activities in which it is interwoven (Wittgenstein, 2004, p. 12). In linguistics, the understanding of nomenclature as part of a language game is based on a theory by Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who names the main determinants of play: freedom, autonomous nature, distinctiveness, order, and mystery (Huizinga, 1985, pp. 19-29). These virtual creations are the elements of the anthroponymic system in which features mentioned by Huizinga are implemented, which thus makes it possible to consider them one of the varieties of the language game.

Generally speaking, a language game is understood as a set of stylistic treatments, to varying degrees exceeding the rules of the linguistic code in the structural and semantic layers, whose aim is to produce a comic effect, to make the reader laugh (Rzemykowska, 2005, p. 76). In his article *Język wchodzi w gry - o grach językowych na przykładzie sloganów reklamowych*,

nagłówków prasowych i tekstów graffiti [“Language enters the game - language games and the examples of advertising slogans, press headlines and graffiti texts”] Bartłomiej Guz also takes into account, citing Ewa Jędrzejko’s (1997, p. 66) standpoint, the role of associative connotations, intertextuality, and intersemioticity (Guz, 2001, p. 10). The language researcher suggests a division of language games taken from Maria Wojtak’s lectures: language games are divided into text-based games (phonic, graphic, and lexical-form games) and intertextual games (Guz, 2001, pp. 10-19).

4.2.1. Text-based games

Phonic-form games, reflected in the structure of onymic creations, result from the use of rhymes:

Polish: Dominika-ROBAKI Z PAKI (Dominica-BUGS FROM THE JUG), GródSmród (gordstench), Koksdrops (Nosecandyjawbreaker), Sanczes_Panczes Russian: Mirkazefirka (Mirkazephyr), Mister Twister, lada sedan – bakłażan (lada sedan – aubergine).

Graphic-form games can be classified as lexical-form games. A word forming the onomastic basis of a virtual creation can be read in two ways, or part of the word can be graphically distinguished and form a separate word. A spelling error may also be graphically highlighted to emphasise that it is an intentional error. It also happens that Polish and Russian names are stylised into English, or individual letters in their structure are replaced by characters from outside the native alphabet.

As the analysis indicates, the non-traditional form of internet proper names is most often achieved by giving a name an original foreign-language-like shape, mainly by means of stylisation, i.e., a compound of mother-tongue and foreign-language norms at the level of spelling, phonetics or word formation. The result of mixing the norms of the mother tongue and foreign language is the creation of unusual proper names, referred to as exotic. Name-based derivatives are usually stylised at the orthographic level and are visible in spelling:

- a) “sh” instead of “sz” (Russian: Irushka, annapershutkina);
- b) “ch”, “sch” or “tsh” instead of “cz” (Russian: alenochka, Alexasha, elenochkaJulychik);
- c) “oo” instead of “ó” or “u” (Polish: Anoosia, izagoorak);
- d) “u” instead of “ł” (Polish: michau);
- e) “q” instead of “ku” (Polish: qba9);
- f) “x” instead of “ks”/“h” (Russian: Alexandersibir);
- g) “v” instead of “w” (Russian: Alina.Aleksandrova, Alina.Usmanova, Alla.Arhipova);
- h) “y” instead of “j” (Russian: Anastasiya.Graf);
- i) of the entire onym or its parts in accordance with several foreign-language spelling rules (Polish: Cashthelanski, cassyoosh, jkovoalsky, Russian: Alexasha, Anastasiya.Demyanova);
- j) phonetic spelling of entire onyms (Polish: Czarls, Dawidow90, hajdi08, henri, kriss, piterp22, piterp24, piterW, Niki20);
- k) foreign-language names: Polish: Alex, Blind Harry, bobi5445 Claudi92, Dave, d_ave, Danny, Dany, Dante, dexter, Eddy, Fred, gilbert, gina, Hans, Isabell81, Jack, James D., Jeanne89, John_123, lary1977, M!KE, noah, oscar38, Peter, seanmichael, seanmichael2, Simon, Tommy, tommyy, wendy86, Russian: grace019, Helen, helen1981, helen22, Helen30, Jonah, Joe, Jony X, Kate, kate_095, Marry, Mischell83, Nora.

Appellatives, which form the onomastic basis of many internet creations, can also be stylised. As in the case of names motivated by an onym, the stylisation of appellative names becomes apparent through spelling:

- a) “sh” instead of “sz” - Polish: shUUKam (I am looking for);
- b) “ch”, “sch” or “tsh” instead of “cz” - Polish: charovna (charming);
- c) “oo” instead of “ó” or “u” - Polish: Boomerang;
- d) “u” instead of “ł” - Polish: bauvan (snowman);
- e) “th” instead of “t” - Polish: DżakPirath;
- f) the entire appellative or its parts according to several English spelling rules, e.g.. Polish: Koorchuck;
- g) phonetic spelling of English words, phrases, expressions: Russian: dudeluk, Ajlavju.

Internet pseudonyms on forums take a graphic form that deviates from the generally accepted rules of word spelling, including proper names. Furthermore, in characterising the humorous properties of onyms on the internet, the following orthographic peculiarities distinguishing proper names can be identified:

- a) multiple letters: Polish: AAALA, aadam15, bernadettt, Russian: Aleeeena, Alekssandr, annyshhka;
- b) the use of capital letters: Polish: MYLOVVVE, KARALEVA, KATERINO4KA;
- c) the use of graphic elements, including icons and emoticons: Polish: KotUś :* (Kitty), k@sia, Russian: elen@, Alin@;
- d) visual-verbal puns involving interleaving of lowercase letters with uppercase letters: Polish: BaDKiTTy;
- e) forms combining text and graphics: Russian: -=Highway=-.

As demonstrated by the examples, communicating in virtual spaces is a combination of the spoken word and writing. However, taking into account the conversational nature of means of communication, the concept of oral literacy has been introduced into the literature in relation to online communication (Siwiec, 2014, p. 101). Tellingly, online communication is all about making an impression: what is important is not what you say, but how you say it (Zajac 2008: 79). It is likely that the rapidly increasing number of web users is intensifying their desire to stand out. It is probably also for this reason that when communicating, internet users use the language that often takes surprising forms, going beyond the accepted norm. The excerpted material makes it possible to unequivocally conclude that the combination of letters and digits may increase the attractiveness of the name by introducing an element from beyond the orthographic usage into its structure. In this regard, the spelling of the number *four* instead of the Russian letter *У* is particularly noticeable: eleno4ka, Alyon4ik, Jul4ik. On the other hand, the Polish digit 4 can be used - due to its pronunciation - to replace the English preposition *for*: hungry4you. Users also create anthroponyms in Polish by weaving in digits that visually resemble letters of the alphabet: A-4, E-3, O-0, S-\$, Z-2: \$tef4n, 3lizA. Such measures testify to the creativity of the author of the onym and to the fact that he or she belongs to a closed social group, and the understanding of the language game of a given group, based on ambiguity, may refer to realities known only to its members.

Playing with lexical forms is most often based on the ambiguity of words, and in the process of creating virtual names, the figurative meaning of both appellatives and onyms is used: Koksdrops (Nosecandyjawbreaker), lipa05 (sham05), lipazehej (whatasham), sajgon (mess). In

addition, single examples of virtual names using ambiguous words as components of phraseologisms⁶ were noted in the material: Polish: *femmfatal*. Proper names, bearing certain meanings and connotations, are also subject to specific transformations: Polish: *Ojciec Dyrektor* (Father Director). In such cases, this is a metaphorical use of proper names in order to create a new online image. Lexical-form games also include the juxtaposition of etymologically related words, which is one type of repetition: Polish: *myślicielski myśliciel* (thinking thinker). However, these are only a few examples of proper names which may indicate that, for web users, orthographic peculiarities of names are more attractive than semantic transformations.

4.2.2. *Intertextual games*

As opposed to lexical games, intertextual games require a wider range of communicative competence of the recipient, as they involve quoting or paraphrasing characteristic texts known in a given culture or environment: *3wojny (w tym 2swiatowe)* (3wars (including 2worldwars)), *windadonieba (lifttoheaven)* (the first one may refer to the Polish film *Sami swoi*, the second to the title of a popular song). In addition to the ever-increasing number of formally diverse names, the issue of motivation is undoubtedly one of the difficulties. Additional knowledge in this regard would be provided by sociolinguistic research into naming motivations (e.g., without knowing the individual inspirations of the name-makers, it is difficult to decide whether a name or a surname included in the structure of the onym refers directly to its bearer or whether it is completely randomly chosen and has nothing to do with the user at a formal level). Apart from its obvious conveniences, IT technology and the specificity of virtual contact also raise many questions of interpretation (mainly those related to associations in the choice of the appellative or onym name).

5. Conclusion

Virtual space has its own peculiarities and the emergence of the internet has enabled new and creative ways of shaping language. The possibility to interact with an unlimited audience, the desire to stand out among thousands of computer technology users and to show a sense of humour are just a few reasons why a strong interference of foreign language forms can be increasingly noticed when analysing virtual space by means of asynchronous intercultural communication. Virtual proper names attract readers' attention, entertain, and trigger imagination. They stimulate thinking and other creative acts due to their non-standard form, which is the result of a language game. From the perspective of linguistic creation, understanding media onyms means characterising the bearer of a cyber-name, characterising a specific way of self-representation from a given point of view. Creating unusual proper names is a result of mixing the norms of the user's own language and a foreign language. The humorous form is most often achieved by a deliberate distortion of the linguistic content known to users by giving the name an original form, mainly through stylisation, i.e., combining the norms of the user's own language and a foreign language at the orthographic, phonetic, word-formative, or semantic level. Onomastic creations on forums adopt a form that varies from the generally accepted rules and surprises the recipient in many cases, thus increasing the likelihood of a humorous interpretation. Although this trend has been present in the sphere of virtual

⁶ In Polish, the term *frazeologia* ('phraseology') has two basic meanings, i.e. "a branch of linguistics dealing with the analysis and description of word combinations existent in a given language and a collection of fixed word combinations existent in a given language or in a given set of texts (...); ('phraseologism'), is a combination of at least two words, one of which is used in the meaning which is not typical of the constituent at issue, i.e., is different from its lexical meaning" (Szerszunowicz, 2012, p. 141).

communication for a long time, it has recently become more pronounced and has involved new or less productive naming mechanisms. The peculiarities of writing, based mainly on the graphic and linguistic games apparent in their structure – despite making internet names very difficult to read – are popular among internet users, primarily because of the constant search for originality and expression possibilities. This paper uses only websites related to sports and takes into account only two Slavic languages. At a given stage, I report preliminary findings in this paper, and discuss methodological issues that will drive future research. An extended analysis of other websites or a comparison of Internet names in other languages may add additional information to the discussion on the topic of names on the Internet.

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