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УДК 81'373.231:81'27]:004.77

PERSONAL NAMES ON THE INTERNET:
USERNAMES AS ADDRESS TERMS

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In this article, I would like to suggest how usernames in the form of personal names might be read as a means of identity performance. The approach that I propose is to analyse them in terms of social distance and familiarity, similarly to address and reference terms used in off-line communication. By using the example of forum *Посиделки* (Gatherings) I am going to demonstrate how particular forms of personal names functioning as usernames may influence audience's perception of the named as well as the character of relationship between the interlocutors in CMC.

Keywords: usernames, personal names, address and reference terms, identity, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).

Research on usernames, although still not sizeable, constitutes an important element of Internet linguistics study. Limited audiovisual cues in Computer Mediated Communication (thereafter CMC) make the usernames play a particularly important role in constructing virtual identities and defining relationships between the interlocutors [1–7].

Although usernames derived from ordinary personal names occur in most studied environments of CMC, sometimes to a significant proportion, they have received less attention than invented usernames as tools of identity performance, which 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 [8].

While etymologically transparent usernames construct identities of the named by associations with specific semantic categories, usernames in the form of personal names may carry different concepts of identities. The approach taken in this article is to analyse them in terms of social distance and familiarity, similarly to address and reference terms used in off-line communication. By using the example of forum *Посиделки*[1] (*Gatherings*) I am going to demonstrate how particular forms of personal names functioning as usernames may influence audience's perception of the named as well as the character of relationship between the interlocutors in CMC.

Distribution of this type of usernames varies from one study to another, for example in Bechar-Israeli's [9] sample 7.8% of usernames were derived from personal names, while in Lev and Lewinsky's [8] – 42.8%. They also vary in form: they might be derived from given names, surnames, or both, refer to official, familiar forms, foreign equivalents of given names, initials, and other non-standard derivations, e.g. *katarzynazawada* – Katarzyna Zawada, *Bedek* – Bednarski (surname), *Garbul* – Garbulski (surname), *Tomjab* – Tomasz Jablonski,

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[1] http://posidelok.net/

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ISSN 2227-5525. Мова і суспільство. 2013. Випуск 4.

fee – Eef (given name), *Fox* – De Vos (English translation of Dutch surname). They might also be combined with other elements, such as other names, digits, initials, typographic symbols, and common vocabulary [10: 147–152; 11: 118–121; 12: 106–108]. Their visual aspect may be affected by various spelling alterations: *niNA, MiReK, An25na, a37dam, Dejvid* – David, *Dżak* – Jack, *Kashia* – Kasia, *Tomashek* – Tomaszek, *YOUstyna* – Justyna, *Ren@t@, @si@, Paaameeelkkka, ERYKK, Ola_Ola* [13].

The analysis of demographics in terms of age and gender by Swennen [12: 106–108] based on a survey has revealed that women used more often 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 – 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 names[2] instead: they find that these names suit them best [12: 106], for their aesthetic value [14: 300–303], to advertise their true selves [4], to authenticate gender in dating chat rooms [2: 258] and to indicate honesty and reliability in discussion groups [13].

On the other hand, personal names may function on the Internet in contrast to invented usernames; as alternative address terms they may play a context-indicating role: participants may change address terms to indicate 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 "real" in contrast to the playful interaction under the usernames [15: 469] or to highlight personal character of the conversation [5: 21–22].

In everyday life we perform several roles; this is supported by the systems of address and reference terms. Nicolaisen's article "An Onomastic Autobiography" [16] gives an illustrative account on how personal names and other address terms used in a single life by both the named and others contribute to constructing identities and relationships experienced by individuals throughout their lives.

Names as forms of address and reference might be combined with, or avoided and replaced by other terms, such as kin terms (mother, sister, pa, dad), non-kin-role terms (doctor, officer, judge), honorific, or respect terms (Mr, Ms, Sir, Your Honour). The difference between personal names and role terms, general appellations, honorifics, etc lies in the fact that the former indicate addressing an individual, while the latter – a role occupant or category member; combinations of both suggests that some fusion of these effects is desired [17: 98].

Although globally "meaningful" names seem more common [17: 60], majority of European nations' names, including Russian, have lost their semantics, and their meaning has become "less etymological and more social, less linguistic and more sociolinguistic."[3] [18:

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[2] Irrespective of whether or not they are users' real names

[3] Actually, some research suggests that even names with no transparent semantics have an attitude-shaping potential in this way that they tend to generate common associations regarding such qualities as activity-passivity, masculinity-femininity, attractiveness-unattractiveness, which makes certain names more desirable than other and influences perception and treatment of their bearers, e.g. students with more desirable names may receive higher grades, e.g.: *Macrae C., Mitchell J. P., Pendry L. F.* What's in a Forename? Cue Familiarity and Stereotypical Thinking / C. Macrae, J. P. Mitchell, L. F. Pendry // Journal of Experimental Social Psychology. – 2002. – № 38. – P. 186–193; *Whissell C.* Sound and Emotion in Given Names / Whissell // Names. – 2001. – P. 97-120; *Mehrabian A.* Impressions Created by Given Names / A. Mehrabian // Names. – 1997. – P. 19–33.

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195]. The social meaning of personal names expresses in the various competing forms of usage and their relations to each other.[4]

A standard Russian personal name consists of three components: a given name, a patronymic and a 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 [20]. Personal names as address terms play in Russian specifically important role; they are typically repeted 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". [19: 25].

The decision about an appropriate form of address or reference is likely to be based on the following factors [21: 371]: "(…) speaker's relationship to the referent, the speaker's relationship to the addressee, the relationship between the addressee and the referent, the presence of over-hearers including the referent, the social context, and what the speaker wishes to express or emphasize 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 [17: 159–160].

Alford [17: 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, use diminutives, or 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 using a more familiar term;
-   interaction between members of insider and outsider groups – typically, the outsider group would adjust at the system of address of the insiders, but they also may reject it and this way refuse to redefine their identities.[5]

According to Сальмон [22: 29] four aspects of social relationships are expressed by address and reference forms:

-   official/non-official context;
-   socio-professional hierarchy;
-   age-related hierarchy;[6]
-   presence/absence of the referent.

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[4] In fact, according to Callary [18: 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 not only socially indicative how one of the elements behaves, but also how all the elements work with each other, i.e. appear and disappear,or change order.

[5] It should be noted, that cultural differences may cause misunderstandings that are not meant as acts of deliberate resistance.

[6] Although in Russian there is no age-related name change as in some cultures, there are some sighs of such change, e.g. usage a patronymic would normally only apply to adult referents – unless used for example ironically [22: 35, 42; 36: 150–151].

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Usage of address forms is culture-specific, and is a particularly sensitive indicator of social, cultural and political change [23: 856; 24]. Virtually any social factor may implement variation in the choice of address form: regional dialect, urban vs. rural background, class, education, age, gender, ideology, religion, group membership, and other; there might be clusters of factors supporting, or interfering with one another [25: 23].

In Russian, the forms of reference and address are amongst important indicators of shift in interpersonal relationships after the transformation from communist to capitalist system, accompanied by general globalisation, development of new communication technologies such as email, Internet, SMS, as well as related foreign influences. In the new socio-political conditions, a number of doubts and confusions arose regarding the issue of appropriate address forms. How to address strangers politely but not pretentiously and without ideological overtone, how to address the police workers or politicians, what address terms are appropriate in court, or in official Internet communication, such as customer services, are amongst these situations where the universal standards have not yet been established, or are just in the process of institutional or customary implementation [19: 25; 26–33].

An interesting change in using names as address forms has been noticed by Krongauz [19: 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, Антон, Максим, Никита, Вера, Нина, Марина;

- 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), Владимир (Володя), Дмитрий (Дима, Митя), Михаил (Миша), Анна (Аня), Екатерина (Катя), Елена (Лена), Мария/Марья (Маша, Маруся), Надежда (Надя).

Before, if the names from the latter group had been used in their full variant as form of address or self-reference, it would have been found pretentious and unnatural; they were only used with patronymics. However, it has changed recently: the sphere of using patronymics seems to have narrowed and virtually disappeared from these 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 short names like Masha or Volodia became too familiar, and have been replaced by the full variant. 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 a polite "вы" pronoun, although the informal "ты" is also not uncommon [30].

On the Internet as a medium and communication tool, standards of communicative behaviour do not seem to differ enough from those off-line to be considered an autonomous system: they are adjusted at specific environment, i.e. different for the casual communication than academic or business; additional norms may be introduced when necessary [19: 29]. Several studies have confirmed a conversational character of both synchronous and asynchronous CMC.[7] Internet can be said to combine both private and public character of the

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[7] For details and relevant references see *Herring S. C.* Computer-Mediated Conversation: Introduction and Overview / Herring S. C. // *Language@Internet* – 2011. – article 2.

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discourse.[8] The number of interlocutors and over-hearers are quite unpredictable: in the case of forums the records are stored, which means extended time of contributing and a potentially unlimited number of readers.

Usernames serve as customary terms of address and reference. They are selected before any interaction takes place; they are fixed and all future interlocutors will normally refer to them. As in CMC we have to do with self-naming then technically it is the addresses' initiative to choose the address term. Usernames can therefore be compared to presentation names ("the name form or forms by which we call ourselves and by which we present ourselves to our various publics" [18: 196]) that have been demonstrated to be actively used to support creation of a specific image of the named or character of relationship in public discourse and media (18; 34: 153).

Посиделки is a forum where participants find entertainment and advice in the form of discussions on various subjects related to personal, professional and social life: health, interests, sport, food, fashion, technical subjects, relationships and other, as well as questionnaires, anecdotes, games and competitions. Any registered user can open a discussion; the range of topics is extremely broad and covers virtually anything from "how do you have your coffee" to "what is your opinion on the death sentence".

Upon registration, users create so-called 'profiles' filled in with information about them. Usernames are the only obligatory elements of the profile necessary to complete the registration. Additionally, the participants may choose to reveal: real names, date of birth, gender, place of origins/living, ICQ identification, interests as well as any other information in the section "about myself". Participants are also allowed space for additional self-expression which usually includes pictures, slogans, links, etc, and may select avatars – especially formatted pictures downloadable from the Internet. Apart from the participant-filled content, each profile automatically displays: status – depending on engagement in the forum users are categorised as: newbie's, participants, active participants, fellows, mates, friends, frequenters, old chaps, elite, banned, moderator, as well as dates of registration, last visit and last activity, total time spent on the forum, a number of postings, "respect points", "positive points", a number of rewards and a number of invitations. The users are free to choose any username provided that it is not confusingly similar to any of the already existent, does not offend anybody, or in any other way breaches common moral norms; they are allowed to change their names by reporting to administrators who have access to settings.

Currently, there are 652[9] registered users of both genders and various ages. All participants' profiles and posts are archived and accessible to both registered and unregistered visitors; only registered users are allowed to participate. There are also private pages hidden from guests.

Almost half of participants (47.4%) derived their usernames from various forms of personal names[10]. The participants use both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, as well as other tools to tailor their usernames. Various techniques are for example applied to create variants of popular names: *Juliya, Юлия, ЮлияК, юлия20112011, Юля, Юля123, Юльк@, Юлечка,*

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[8] See for example *Hudson J. M., Bruckman A.* "Go Away": Participant Objections to Being Studied and Ethics of Chatroom Research / J. M. Hudson, A. Bruckman // The Information Society. – 2004. – № 20. – P. 127–139 for ethical and legal aspects.
[9] 30th August 2013
[10] Names that obviously referred to renowned persons or characters, such as *AnnaKarenina, Audrey Tautou* or *Tarantino*, have been excluded.

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and Юленька, or: *Anna, Annna, annadro, Anny26, ANNA-ANUTA, Анна, анья, анька3, and Анютка:).*

The visual components may affect the perception of the named. Incorporating emoticons into the usernames, e.g. a 'kiss': *Оль:*, Little_Gabi**, or a 'smile': *Анютка:)*, gives an impression of increased familiarity or even intimacy, or reduces the impression of distance, such as in the case of *В!А!Л!Е!РИ!Я=)* – although the name is in its full form, the amount of visual effects applied to it (a "smile", upper case indicating raised voice in CMC, enhanced by exclamation marks) makes it look informal. Other visual effects include:

- decorative elements: *~Malikka~, Nura+, (*_ TrinA TyleR _*);*
- all lower case: *янка, сергей;*
- all upper case: *MAGDALINA, HELEN;*
- random usage of upper and lower case: *LariSKA gitaristka, ТЁмыЧ, ricARDO;*
- numbers: *Anny26, Ulyana13111975, Alexandr777;*
- replacing letters with symbols or numbers: *WoW@, Ok$y, T@To4ka;*
- no space between components: *VorobievMihail, GoshaFaust;*
- repetition: *Theodora_Theodora;*
- other modifications to spelling: *KuznetsoFF, Аnnna, Кристинкааа.*

In Посиделки, amongst all usernames derived from personal names, most frequently are used given names in their standard form: 45.3%, which amounts to 21.5% of all usernames. In general, an official form of a given name, such as *Анастасия, Анна, Валерия, Дмитрий007, Dmitry, Екатерина, Евгения, Катерина, мария, НАДЕЖДА, Олександер, Svetlana, Татьяна*, although not combined with patronymics or surnames, does not seem to encourage familiarity or intimacy, but conveys a formal or socially distant attitude. However, considering the classification proposed by Krongauz, we notice several names that do not take neutral shortened forms, e.g. *andrei777, Диана, Илона, Луиза, Margo2009, МАРИНА, Maya, Нарцисс@, павел, Сара*, in which case the full variants play the role of both official and neutral unofficial forms. Also, there are a number of foreign-sounding usernames that might be derived from both Russian or foreign names, e.g. *Anny26, bruno, camilla, HELEN, Melissa, Natali88, Stefany (Stephanie), Willa, Ирэн (Irene), Марко (Marko), Фиби (Phoebe), 475@Элен (Ellen), Элинор (Eleanor), Эттель (Ethel), Эшли (Ashley).* Some of these names may refer to public figures. For example, *ricARDO* may refer to a footballer and *Мелани* (Melanie) to a pop-singer; still, they are popular names that have multiple renowned referents, or may not refer to anybody in particular.

Another frequent form of usernames in *Посиделки* are informal derivations of given names, including shortened names and various forms of diminutives (39.5% of usernames derived from personal names and 18.7% of all usernames). In general, the use of informal forms of given names suggests casual, familiar, or intimate attitude. The speakers of Russian can choose from a wide range of informal forms of names that carry highly nuanced emotional shades. The use of a specific form indicates attitudes of the speaker towards the named, however, the meaning or function of the forms are situational and largely depend on non-linguistic factors [22: 47]. The choice is thus individual and subjective, for example, affectionate names may be used ironically or otherwise opaque.

On the other hand, the named, too, may prefer and encourage using one particular form of their name [17: 141] and, in addition, in the case of usernames the choice does not apply to any specific interaction. Therefore, it might be, at least to some extent, assumed that the emotional value of selected variant will refer to the common understanding of the qualities carried by certain types of derivations. For example, amongst the forms derived from the name Мария, Муська will probably be considered as suggesting familiarity, while

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Маруська, Машка and Манька "may convey a certain degree of disparagement", etc [35: 49].

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

- shortened names, such as: *dasha, jana1511, Masha, wanja, WoW@, Stam, Влад, катя, ксюш@, Лена, миша, Настя, саша, Яна111* will probably encourage informal interaction with no particular emotional attitude. Some of the shortened names are foreign-looking: *alex25, Alex777555, ~Jess~, kim, Ok$y, эд;*

- diminutive forms, for example *Викуся, Дуняша, ирюша, Кисюша, LenOk1983, Lotik, Marysha, Marysja, Маруся, Svetik09, Танюша, K@tik* may suggest enhanced familiarity and warmer attitude. Some of them have more affectionate tone, such as *Danochka, Алиночка, Никитосик, Олесенька, Рикулька, Санечка, сашулька, T@To4ka, Эммочка, Юленька, Юлечка*, and may suggest increased level of intimacy or friendliness. They might remind endearing terms, such as sweetheart, darling, honey, however names will emphasize individuality, while common endearing terms categorise a person as nice, sweet, cute, dear, likable etc. Again, some of diminutive names look foreign: *Andi, Jenny, Jessi, Katty, Little_Gabi*;*

- derogatory diminutive forms, for example *Алешка, анька3, Дашка, Климка, ксюшка, Ленка, mashka, олька, Яська*, and augmentative *ТАНЮХА* can perhaps be compared to familiarising terms such as pal, buddy, dude, or mate, that in general reinforce solidarity and equality, however, unlike familiarizers, that can be used to address strangers, e.g. to reduce social distance, using the name highlights individuality. Also, they might associate with nicknames that indicate familiarity, too, as well as the status of the group insider. They are used especially within the same age group and more often by young people, and might carry a hint of friendliness or hostility [21: 376].

15.2% of usernames referring to personal 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, e.g. *KatarinaShlein, ludakaplata, ShumIrina, Мэри Ли*, or *нина калмыкова*. Surnames, the newest element of Russian personal names, were introduced specifically for official purposes and basically remained limited to this sphere in their standard use for individuals[11]. Typically they are used in formal, especially written communication, and may be perceived as displaying a reserved attitude [36: 151; 37: 165–166]. Introducing oneself by a full name will entail using a polite pronoun "вы" (pl. "you")[12] rather than familiar "ты" (sing. "you") by the interlocutors.[13] An informal form of given name (e.g. *GoshaFaust, Лола_Дорофеева*) makes the name slightly less official, while the reversed order (*VorobievMihail, klichevmarat*) might seem even more

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[11] In informal language they might be used to designate families, e.g. Акимовы, Дорохины [37: 165–166].

[12] The generally polite forms do not always connote politeness, e.g. in German a parent addressed by "Sie" would probably consider this a joke rather than a polite compliment [25: 48].

[13] However, it should once again be highlighted that the language in use is much more flexible than the general rules and likely to surpass their borders depending on circumstances – as stated by one of the speakers at a conference "Феномен Петербурга" in 2001 to outline the advantage of the Petersburg's style over the Moscow's: "In Moscow they say *Наталия* (official), *иди сюда!* (familiar), while in Petrsburgh we say: *Наташенька* (affectionate), *идите сюда* (polite)." [22: 42]. Nicolaisen [16: 182] gives another example how address forms can be individualised: his schoolteacher, with whom he remained in touch throughout his adult life, kept calling him Willy as at school, but in combination with the formal "Sie" instead of familiar "Du" in deference to his academic status.

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ISSN 2227-5525. Мова і суспільство. 2013. Випуск 4.
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formal as it is virtually restricted to official writing, such as documents or alphabetical lists. Also, surnames (as well as patronymics) categorise individuals as family members while single names make the group identity irrelevant [20]. Foreign-sounding names like *John Warner* and *(*_TrinA TyleR_*)* seem to be pseudonymous usernames, perhaps they refer to some specific figures recognisable to the "insiders". Full names may also be used as markers of authenticity and reliability [13: 2].

Some users selected usernames that look like given names and initials: *Dianara* (Диана Р. А.), *EvgeniyaS, GalinaAM, lyudmilad* (Людмила Д.), *milata* (Мила Т. А.), *Rimma T, Аврора_М, ТатьянаБ, ЮлияК.* Given names combined with initials look more distant than a single given name, and may associate with written rather than spoken communication, although diminutives with initials, such as *Луруси4ка* (probably Л. У. Русичка) look more familiar. Surnames combined with initials: *gerasimovami* (Gerasimova M. I.), *kuzminalu* (Kuzmina L. U.) refer to official, written communication. Another type of derivations from personal names: *annadro* and *mariasam* possibly indicate a name and a first syllable of the surname or patronymic; such forms are not typically used in off-line communication. The attachment to the given name may have, for example, been used to differentiate the username from other derived from the same given name.

A couple of usernames remind surnames: *primstin, Suvorov, valerman.* The use of surnames alone seems to suggest social distance, but without overtones of respect. In formal communication interlocutors might address each other by a single surname – however, it would normally be accompanied by a title or honorific. When interaction involves a superior and a subordinate, the superior may address the subordinate by a surname only. Playing with spelling may make the name look more casual or humorous, e.g. *KuznetsoFF* (Kuznetsov). Also, *Sladuskin* and *Сиделкин* remind literary characterising names, styled as surnames by suffix –in.

Usernames *sergeevich19* and *ТЁмыЧ* (Артёмыч?) are probably patronymics, while *надин* and *Танюшкин* possibly refer to female names Надя and Таня respectively, meaning "belonging to this person". Unlike surnames, however, that link individuals with a group of relatives, these usernames indicate affiliations with one specific person – a father (*sergeevich19* and *ТЁмыЧ*) and, possibly, a romantic partner (*надин* and *Танюшкин*). In general, using a patronymic can be treated as a marker of distance in both official and social spheres[14], however, used by itself, it indicates familiarity and entails using the "ты" pronoun, e.g. – Никитич, иди сюда! [22: 41]. Also, shortened patronymics are not suitable for official situations.

Some participants of *Посиделки* have combined names with other categorising terms that place them in the social context by indicating their role, status or kin position. Address terms other than names are said to fix the character of relationship, make it nonnegotiable, fix asymmetries and make the parties keep to the standards by ensuring controlled response [17: 100–101, 109–113].

Usernames *LariSKA gitaristka*, *Santalara* and *Царица Ирина* can perhaps be compared to occupational and role titles, such as doctor, judge, president, officer. They categorise and authenticate the person as a member of the given group that holds specific qualifications, skills, competencies, as well as trigger specific concepts of the so classified persons. Using a name along with it adds more individuality, and in the case of a familiar form, more casual character. Thus we could say, that selecting such usernames is an attempt

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[14] In casual communication a combination "name plus patronymic" also functions, and might be used in shortened form, e.g. Пал Палыч instead of Павел Павлович [22: 42].

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to claim an "expert"[15] status – or, as it involves self-naming, is a discursive strategy of constructing an expert identity.

Mère Susie (Mother Susie) and *Лилия мама* combine given names with kin terms, in Russian 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 [17: 102–103]. They also generate concepts of specific categories. Incorporated into usernames, they might indicate the importance of a particular kin role to the username bearer, but 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: *сынок/дочька* to address a young person, *дедушка/бабушка* for the elderly, informal *братец*, and other. They may be said to reduce distance and express worm attitude [19: 25]. Other names combined with characterising terms are: *Старушка_Бетти* directly 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, and *Сергей gold, AnastasiaNew, Ирочка плюс,* which 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 entities, e.g. a song title. According to Alford [17: 98] "The use of honorific or respect terms, with or without other forms of address and reference, indicates that one is assuming a deferential attitude granting the other person some latitude in determining the parameters of the interaction or relationship." Using an honorific alone may, on the other hand, be contrasted with personal names, as they only generally categorise the addressee. Amongst those used in *Посиделки*, *Lady* may refer either to politeness or to status, while *Дамочка* might sound outdated, or even ironic if not sarcastic, especially in diminutive form.

To conclude, the proportion of usernames derived from personal names in the present study seems to confirm the importance of names in Russian communication. The analysed data reveals a clear preference for single given name in both formal and informal form. A considerable number of names in full, official form accompanied by the nearly absence of patronymics seem in line with Krongauz's observation that a single given name is becoming a new neutral official form of address.

In the subsequent research, other CMC environments on RuNet as well as within other languages could be analysed. It would also be interesting to find out what demographic factors are most likely to influence the choice of a specific variant of personal name as a username in these environments: age, gender, or perhaps professional or social status, and how the results compare with the outcome of Swennen's survey.

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ВЛАСНІ ІМЕНА В ІНТЕРНЕТ-КОМУНІКАЦІЇ: НІКИ ЯК ФОРМИ СПІЛКУВАННЯ

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У статті обговорюються імена користувачів (ніки) у вигляді власних імен як засіб конструювання ідентичності. Автор пропонує аналізувати їх з погляду соціальної дистанції та знайомства, подібно до форм звертання, які використовуються у реальній комунікації. На

прикладі форуму *Посиденьки* (Gatherings) пояснюється, як певні форми власних імен, що використовуються як імена користувачів, можуть впливати на сприйняття аудиторією та визначати характер відносин між співрозмовниками в Інтернет-комунікації.

Ключові слова: імена користувачів, власні імена, форми звертання, ідентичність, комп'ютерно-опосередкована комунікація (СМС).

ЛИЧНЫЕ ИМЕНА В ИНТЕРНЕТ-КОММУНИКАЦИИ:
НИКИ КАК ФОРМЫ ОБРАЩЕНИЯ

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В статье обсуждаются «юзернеймс» (имена интернет-пользователей, ники) в виде личных имен как средство конструирования идентичности. Предлагается рассмотрение их как средств выражения отношений между собеседниками с точки зрения социальной дистанции и знакомства сходных с формами обращения используемыми в офф-лайн коммуникации. На примере форума *Посиделки* объясняется, как определенные формы личных имен, использумых в качестве «юзернеймс», могут восприниматься аудиторией и определять характер отношений между собеседниками в интернет-коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: юзернейм, личное имя, формы обращения, идентичность, компьютерно-опосредованная коммуникация/ интернет-коммуникация.