Nicknames of Romanian Politicians after 1989

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1. Preliminaries

1.1. Politicians' nicknames – strategies of *argumentum ad hominem*[1]

The present-day world of Romanian politics takes the shape of a theatre of operations from a warring area, a Gaza Strip whose property deed is continually claimed by parties found at either ends of the political spectrum. These parties insult one another publicly, suspect and tell on one another to the National Anticorruption Directorate. They even listen in on their private conversations and discredit each other by means of compromising films. All the aforementioned events, alongside many others, unfold before the alert yet blind eyes and under the allegedly fair consideration of a system of justice that is overwhelmed by the multitude of penal cases pending before courts of law, with ever-postponed trial dates.

Nicknames have become means of attack, picked by belligerent interlocutors from the arsenal at hand. They are prolonged-release antidotes used to destroy opponents and their effect is visible in the long run, as nicknames become part of users' collective memory. When this happens, speakers associate a nicknamed individual with the verbal tag considered emblematic of the nickname bearer.

Contemporary Romanian society appears to be increasingly oblivious of the principles that underlie its foundation (politeness, promoting respect in interpersonal relationships and acknowledging the distribution of social roles). As a result, the psychological and linguistic profile of Romanian society was altered along with the institution of democracy after 1989. The consequences of hastily adopting a recently imported configuration, unspecific to a community that is respectful of traditional values yet anxious to follow the pace of globalisation and Americanisation at once and at any cost, are also salient in one of the most prolific language compartments, *i.e.* onomastics, as well as within this field, in anthroponymy.

We considered it is of interest to pursue the way in which politicians' nicknames erode the boundaries of informal space and permeate into the agora of allegedly educated lexical registers, where they become stylistic markers of famous figures in contemporary Romanian public discourse in general (not solely in election

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[1] For the typology of arguments, see Săvulescu (2004: 143–156).

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discourse). The arena of Romanian politics has become a menagerie, in which local and exotic fauna parade unvirtuously before voters' helpless gazes. In this respect, nicknames stop being *insults* (lexical variables that nicknames often overlap semantically) and acquire the quality of stereotypical formulas. By means of nicknames, politicians abusively invoke/evoke their opponents, trying to persuade voters by promoting/improving their own social face and, at the same time, diminishing/annihilating their rivals' face. The referent anchored in speech by means of a nickname is identifiable, provided that interlocutors (or the locutor and the audience addressed) have a shared background of encyclopaedic knowledge. All the participants in a certain context of communication (locutor + audience (electorate) + referent (nicknamed person)) must be able to achieve the proper inference in view of restoring the (real nominal) identity that is absent on the level of discourse.

In the present study, we will take into consideration the category of nicknames given to figures in contemporary Romanian politics. By employing theoretical precepts from onomastics, sociolinguistics and pragmalinguistics, we will explore contexts extracted from formal, semi-formal and informal interactions (interviews, public talks, recorded/transcribed television shows and conversation excerpts from various online forums of discussions). The aims are to inventory and analyse the devices used in the construction of the main structures investigated and to group them under certain constitutive patterns, indicating the lexical-semantic fields of origin and the rhetoric-pragmatic functions performed.

1.2. Romanian politicians' nicknames, or on the lack of rhetoric-stylistic inhibitions

Nicknaming in contemporary Romanian political discourse is an offensive attitude, an affront to an adversary's official identity, eliminated by a "barbaric" identity. Nickname givers re-baptise nicknamed individuals to untie them from their primary and arbitrary identity and to weld them to a new identity, a motivated one, which bearers begin to resemble (in the eyes of other individuals) the moment it is assigned. From this viewpoint, nickname givers behave like initial (official) name givers, if one bears in mind the fact that the delineation of a particular element by means of a subsequent name results from the action of several extralinguistic factors (onomastic tradition, name models, beliefs and values that are treasured by naming agents).

By comparison with *historical* (genealogical) names, which are inherited, and *individual* names, which are acquired, *nicknames* are *labels* "attached" to individuals as *additional identifications* (they help avoid anthroponymic homonymy: several bearers of the same family name and/or first name) and *characterising markers* (they are consubstantial with their bearers). Nicknames are *prototypical nominal signs*, *i.e.* conceptualisations of behavioural features that are representative of a certain human type.

Nicknaming is a communicative means of distorting a canonical name, of aggressing it, sometimes going so far as eliminating it or replacing it with another

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name[2]. "Such linguistic behaviour displays *linguistic* specificity, as it highlights the onomastic possibilities of a language, and *cultural* specificity, as it reveals the circumstances that hinder or facilitate the circulation of names and the conditions under which a name mirrors the realities that underlie name-giving" (Milică 2011: 134, orig. Romanian)[3].

The distortion of an official name (in the sense of its aggression or annulment) is a social attitude: a locutor makes use of subjacent means to express opinions and (mostly negative) judgments about the nickname bearer: "the *attack on a name* is only one of the *techniques of personal attack*" (Milică 2011: 134, orig. Romanian). "[…] The aggression of a name is a discursive process with an evaluative role, that is, a process through which the means of anthroponymic distortion facilitate the 'transfer' of a name from the class of individualising markers to that of characterising markers" (Milică 2011: 134, orig. Romanian).

As a result of the process of anthroponymic distortion, a nickname develops a situationally motivated character (it is likely to be meaningful only contextually).

2. The act of nicknaming: breaking the boundaries of differences in stylistic register

According to lexicographic glosses, the *nickname* is an occasional designation with a subjective, affective character – see Sala (2001: 442) and *DEX Online* (orig. Romanian): "PORÉCLĂ, *porecle* [nickname, nicknames], feminine noun. 1. A byname given to a person in relation to a distinctive feature of his / her appearance, psyche or activities. 2. (archaic and regional) A family name. [Variants: (regional) *polícră*, *porícl*ă, feminine noun – From Slavic *poreklo*][4]". These acceptations reveal the idea of a locutor's intention to pay all one's moral "debts" to another individual, whose flawed behaviour is sanctioned through the attribution of a derisive name.

Nicknaming[5] is a "type of deviation from the standard act of naming an individual and it can be explained through the need of the members of a rural micro-

[2] "Nicknames are not just shortenings, and you can cast a negative verdict on someone with a longer rather than a shorter name, given the social setting" (Adams 2015: 185).

[3] All quotes indicated as being originally in Romanian ("orig. Romanian") are only provided as translations.

[4] For a definition of nicknames, see also Candrea (1895/2001) and Graur (1965: 70–72), whereas for a distinction between nicknames and bynames, see Felecan (2014: 35–38).

[5] "*Nicknaming* involves the following successive actions:

– *selection*

– *name-giving*

– *dissemination*

– *use*

and the following 'instances':

– the *patient* (the *nicknamed*) must be known, as s/he is the one who offers for assessment (appreciation) features that support the delineation of the *initial point of view* (the one that underpins the meaning of the nickname);

– the *agent* (the *nickname giver*) is the one who chooses the nickname – alone or in collaboration – and then assigns it;

– the *disseminator* is the one who spreads the nickname;

– the *users* are those who currently employ the nickname, whether they are aware or not of its meaning.

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community to *duplicate* a name. This need can be accounted for by considering the *institutional* name as inappropriate or insufficiently adapted to the (phonetic-)lexical stock of a given community. The spontaneous reflex is either to eliminate (by eschewing) the element perceived as foreign in locutors' current use, or to 'improve' (sometimes by means of hypercorrectness) the 'official' form, to alter it in agreement with acknowledged lexical-semantic (and orthoepic) 'standards' that are (implicitly) accepted by tradition. *Names converted* into nicknames observe this kind of (unwritten) law" (Felecan 2011: 131, orig. Romanian).

As name-giving and name usage, *nicknaming* is an act of communication[6], whose nature is

– *illicit* (the act is produced even outside the rituals established by written and unwritten laws – in church and the Civil Registry),

– *subversive* (in a normal society, a nickname is not driven from the periphery of colloquial language into public discourse, but it is under diaphasic[7] command: its circulation is limited by the boundaries of the informal register of communication)[8] and

– *anonymous* (there seldom exists an initial locutor to assume the paternity of a nickname; the birth of a nickname is obscure, as this name is communicated especially by word of mouth, whereby it becomes entrenched in the collective memory[9]).

The agents in the three categories are *subversive* instances (nicknames are not generally used in public and especially not in the presence of the nicknamed or his/her acquaintances) (Felecan 2011: 144, orig. Romanian).

[6] "[…] At dubbing, nicknaming constitutes a declaration: the illocutionary act brings about the state of affairs to which it refers, just as it does in baptism, marriage, passing sentence, or excommunicating" (Adams 2009: 83).

[7] Coşeriu (1992–1993: 38, orig. Romanian) talks about three major types of linguistic variety: "*diatopic variety* (space-wise), *diastratic variety* (between social and cultural strata in a community) and *diaphasic variety* (between ways of speaking, determined by the very situation of speech and the elements of this situation, namely who does the talking, with whom, about what, in what circumstances)".

[8] "One way or another, nicknames have changed from an informal usage between people who personally know each other and are on more-or-less equal footing, or as an asymmetrical form of address such that the higher status person is free to use the nickname of the lower status person, but not vice versa. […] Their usage has become part of a general social change in which the overt presentation and emphasis on status distinctions are minimized" (Lieberson and Kenny 2007: 319).

[9] The nickname "is a *dynamic* utterance, built with a *specific significance* and *rebuilt* as a result of previous utterances, whose value is revealed *only in use*. It is the product of the *individual voices* in a community and functions according to criteria that are specific to all oral creations. As the utterance source is collective, it is – most of the times – difficult to identify the *locutor* with precision. Although every nickname is accompanied by the history that determined its appearance, the *original point of view* of these encyclopaedic data regarding the biography of the nicknamed individual cannot be delimited by the memory of a given community. This is the reason why the *non-locutor* is the most suitable *discursive being* to assume the role of original utterer.

Thus, in a nickname the contribution of a community of speakers can be 'heard' and one of these speakers may be associated with the *paternity* of the *viewpoint* expressed – in this case, a certain nickname. Several partial stories were 'heard' in its making (and each time it is actualised); of these stories, the common element is *retained/resurrected/rendered in brief*. While the source of the *viewpoint* is embodied by the *non-locutor*, the nickname is actualised by means of *association* every time it is used by an utterer. Therefore, as products, nicknames are instances of 'reported speech'. The

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Nickname-giving is the least offensive sociolinguistic reaction to an individual's assumedly inappropriate behaviour. In nicknames, locutors record the essence of their feelings towards someone else, the essence of their emotions about another person's behaviour (of any kind it may be). Sometimes, this means of verbal exteriorisation may be translated as the tempered reflex of a different sort of individual drive (a physical one); from this viewpoint, nicknames are verbal signs that stand for other (gestural aggressive) signs[10]. In this respect, nicknames function as indices of locutors' level of education. At the opposite end of this extreme perception of nicknames, there is another perspective, fuelled by the ludic-affective aim with which a nickname is created. We refer here to the instances in which nicknames are meant to be mildly ironic about their bearers, an attitude that is remote from the aggressive satire specific to the previous type. Thus, one distinguishes two categories of nicknames based on the illocutionary force that may be identified in a performed utterance:

A. *Insulting nicknames*: the locutor's intention is to "lash", to penalise an attitude in an extreme (extremist) manner;

B. *Ludic nicknames*: the locutor's intention is to "blame" an attitude (sometimes in the shape of verbal endearment).

The practice of nicknaming – which may turn into an obsession, depending on the subjects – is universal, as it does not imply any spatial, social or cultural constraints. In a hierarchy of human attitudes that prototypically appear in the expression of irony towards someone (occurring to a variable extent in the act of nicknaming in both aforementioned categories), we place nicknames in the upper part of the scale. Individuals penalise behaviours that deviate from their spectrum of expectation regardless of the education received, the level of schooling graduated, the social stratum to which one belongs, the environment in which one works, one's age and the role relationship established with the interlocutor, but especially without caring (anymore) to be in agreement with the parameters of a given (formal/ informal) context of communication.

3. Encoding the functions of language in nicknames

Despite the reduced size of their phonetic body (as is frequently the case), nicknames embody (manifest) all the functions of language (defined by R. Jakobson)[11]:

– the *emotive* (*expressive*) *function*: nicknames are expressive speech acts, by means of which locutors externalise a certain state of mind in relation to the nicknamed subject. It is perhaps the most frequently employed function in the

inverted commas are employed because the phrase preserves from the established meaning only the idea of *someone else's speech reported by another individual*; the reporting voice is an utterer that (almost) never overlaps the *discursive being* responsible for the *point of view* expressed" (Felecan 2011: 145, orig. Romanian).

[10] For various types of manifestation of verbal aggressiveness (name-calling, obscenities, insults and threats), see also Culpeper (2011: 4, 199).

[11] For the presentation of language functions, see Jakobson (1964: 87–97) and DSL (2005, *s.v. funcţie*: 225–226).

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construction of a nickname, as it is a speech act[12] that originates in exclusively or chiefly emotional-affective reasons;

– the *conative function*: the message of a nickname has a double addressee: on the one hand, the *allocutor-referent* (the nicknamed person) and, on the other, the *listeners/readers/viewers*, whose role as *spreaders* is to ensure the dissemination of nicknames. The fact that two discursive means can be used to realise nicknames (an allocutive one, carried out in the presence of the reference point, and a non-allocutive one, carried out in the absence of the reference point) – at all events, in both situations, the referent is evoked on the level of a name (different from the official one) accounts for the addressee's multiplicity;

– the *referential* (*denotative*) *function*: a nickname utterance is targeted at its referent (the name bearer) and contains some information about him/her, even if only as a result of language "transfiguration";

– the *metalinguistic function* is activated in the case of nicknames built on sound symbolism and formal exaggeration (the selection is made on the level of the phonetic system), expressing a flaw that a bearer may have (such as a failing in one's speaking ability: *Rârâitul* 'the rhotacistic', masculine form; *Sâsâitul* 'the lisper', masculine form; *Pelticul* 'the speech disordered', masculine form);

– the *phatic function*: as a result of the stylistically picturesque nature that characterises most examples, nicknames trigger "evocative effects", thus keeping alive the interlocutors' interest in using (ensuring the continuity of) a given name. Romanian politicians' nicknames function as nominal tags that have the power to maintain and "inflame" even the atmosphere created by a boring discourse, which is often meant to serve politicians' personal interest rather than to be purely political;

– the *poetic* (*aesthetic*) *function*: is responsible with the internal organisation of the message (see *infra* 4).

4. The semantic-referential level of nicknames

Depending on the lexical-semantic algorithm that nicknames display, the following categories of nicknames were delineated: *appellative-nicknames*, *sentence-nicknames* and *nicknames based on other proper names* (*than the official names of the denotata*). This paper only deals with the first category, as the other two classes make up the object of another study (see Felecan, D. and Felecan, O. 2015).

The names on which nicknames of the first type are based consist of appellatives that become proper names by means of *onymisation* (source-parts of speech – *i.e.* nouns or substantivised parts of speech – are converted into target-parts of speech by being written with capital initials and attaching the individualising name tags thus obtained to referents that are identifiable in context[13]).

[12] For the theory of speech acts, see Austin (2005) and Searle (1972).

[13] On discussing the productivity and frequency of the shifts between the forms of name subclasses (common and proper nouns), Tomescu (2007: 405) identifies two types of transfer (with the implication of numerous lexical-grammatical and semantic changes): "the establishment of common nouns as proper names, resulting in the development of *delexical onomastic series* and, conversely, the use of proper names, by means of antonomasia, as common nouns, making up *deonymic lexical series*." The author calls the former type of transfer *onymisation* and the latter, *lexicalisation*.

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Among the onomasiological fields (to which the previous common nouns pertain), one can mention:

4.1. *The animal world*:

• *Simple appellative*: *Buldogul* ('the bulldog', Vasile Blaga): he received this byname not only because of his prominent jaws, but also for his tenacious nature (typical of people from Transylvania), salient in every gesture (http://romanicablues.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/prin-menajerie-fara-menajamente/)[14]; *Cârlanul* ('the weaned foal', Crin Antonescu): Antonescu "became 'a weaned foal'" (Cristian Preda about Crin Antonescu) (http://www.evz.ro/cristian-preda-iliescu-cunoscut-mai-mult-pentru-poreclele-date-are-o-influenta-subteran-966270.html); *Macac* ('macaque', Traian Băsescu): a nickname given by Mircea Badea, the creator of a pamphlet-style television show, *În gura presei* ('In the mass media's den'): "From now on, I will call Băsescu 'the macaque'" (http://www.antena3.ro/romania/ei-sunt-romania/mircea-badea-lui-basescu-o-sa-ii-spun-de-acum-inainte-macacul-iar-lui-macovei-scoancsa-259773.html); *Pechinezul* ('the Pekingese', Victor Ponta) (journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu about Victor Ponta) (http://www.realitatea.net/zoopolitica-porecle-politicieni_789148.html); *Porumbacul* ('the particoloured chicken', Crin Antonescu): "In 2005, in the heat of declassifying the files of former *Securitate* collaborators, Traian Băsescu called the one who is currently standing in for him as President of Romania 'The particoloured chicken'. This is the name he used to refer to Crin Antonescu in the statement in which he commented on the alliance between Antonescu and Dan Voiculescu, regarding the former's likely collaboration with communist structures. 'Felix and the particoloured chicken, the dove, I mean, Mr Crin Antonescu…'" (http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/bucuresti/Bucuresti-stiri_din_bucuresti-porecle-basescu-antonescu-pointa-felix-dottore-voiculescu-maimutica-pastorul_0_740926003.html); *Scoancsa* ('the female skunk', Monica Macovei): a nickname given by Mircea Badea: "From now on, I will call Băsescu 'the macaque' and Macovei, 'the skunk'" (http://www.antena3.ro/romania/ei-sunt-romania/mircea-badea-lui-basescu-o-sa-ii-spun-de-acum-inainte-macacul-iar-lui-macovei-scoancsa-259773.html); *Ţapu'* ('the goat', Emil Constantinescu): the nickname was owing to the former president's beard, which resembles that of a goat (a goatee) (see http://www.123urban.ro/def/Ţapul); *Varanul* ('the varanus', Dan Voiculescu): a

"The most important shift that *onymisation* implies is semantic. On passing to the subclass of proper names, the common noun is delexicalised and loses its lexical meaning(s). Devoid of its initial meaning, the common noun is contextually associated with another referent, which is designated, by virtue of its appurtenance to a general class of objects, by means of another common noun. Once it becomes a proper name, the common noun behaves as an additional designation meant for identification and individualisation. As a proper name, the common noun may be given simultaneously or successively to a single referent or to several referents (a virtually unlimited number of referents) from the same general class or from distinct classes. At the same time, a referent may receive several proper names, which may be based on different words. This onymic mobility, specific to proper names regardless of their origin, makes the relationship between name and referent depend on situational contextual factors" (Tomescu 2007: 407).

[14] The sources from which the nicknames were selected are in Romanian. Thus, any paraphrased or quoted information is provided only as a translation.

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nickname given many years ago to the founder of Intact Media Group by journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu (see http://www.b1.ro/stiri/monden/termenul-varan-porecla-atribuita-lui-dan-voiculescu-ales-cuvantul-zilei-in-dexonline-chiar-de-ziua-mogulului-foto-38504.html);

• *Appellative + modifier*: *Bichon Sălbatic* ('wild Bichon', Crin Antonescu): he received this nickname from journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu (see http://www.realitatea.net/zoopolitica-porecle-politicieni_789148.html); *Bursucul Veninos* ('the poisonous badger', Adrian Severin): "He is suspected to have his own personal agenda and a huge availability to engage in compromises" (http://romanicablues.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/prin-menajerie-fara-menajamente/); *Guzganul Rozaliu* ('the pinkish rat', Viorel Hrebenciuc): "On March 21, 2005, Cristian Tudor Popescu wrote a memorable editorial, in which he slurred the Social Democrat Viorel Hrebenciuc and called him 'pinkish rat'" (http://www.realitatea.net/politicienii-si-poreclele-lor_82563.html); *Maimuţa Curentată* ('the electrocuted monkey', Gigi Becali): he was called this name by Corneliu Vadim Tudor: "As a matter of fact, Becali is nothing more than an electrocuted monkey. A drunken monkey, that's what Becali is" (http://www.realitatea.net/zoopolitica-porecle-politicieni_789148.html); *Papagalul lui Băse* ('Băse(scu)'s parrot', Emil Boc): a nickname given by Călin Popescu Tăriceanu because Boc used to repeat everything that former president Traian Băsescu would say (see http://www.romanialibera.ro/ actualitate/eveniment/ tariceanu-spune-despre-boc-si-stolojan-ca-sunt-papagalii-lui-basescu--video--121100); *Porc Mincinos* ('lying pig', Mircea Geoană): he received this nickname from Radu Berceanu, a former Minister of Transport, (http://www.ziare.com/basescu/mircea-geoana/competitie-stransa-intre-geoana-si-basescu-la-porecle-politice-963896).

4.2. *The high life*:

• *Appellative + modifier*: *Gigolo de Constanţa* ('Constanţa gigolo', Radu Mazăre): a divorced former mayor, who used to be surrounded by fashion models and does not mind wasting his nights in clubs and on depraved parties; he is currently kept under house arrest due to legal issues;

• *Appellative + locative*: *Blonda de la Cotroceni* ('the blonde from Cotroceni (Palace)', Elena Udrea); *Blonda de la Golden Blitz* ('the blonde from Golden Blitz', Elena Udrea); *Latifundiarul din Pipera* ('the landowner from Pipera', Gigi Becali); *Paiaţa de la Cotroceni* ('the buffoon from Cotroceni', Crin Antonescu): "The latest nickname given by the impeached head of state was delivered on Thursday, July 19, when Băsescu severely attacked interim President Crin Antonescu. The former accused the interim president of having begun the disorganisation of security services. 'We are faced with the unfolding of a coup d'etat', Băsescu stated, calling Crin Antonescu 'the buffoon from Cotroceni'" (http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/bucuresti/Bucuresti-stiri_din_bucuresti-porecle-basescu-antonescu-pointa-felix-dottore-voiculescu-maimutica-pastorul_0_740926003.html); *Udrea of Chaos* (Elena Udrea): she received this nickname after the launch of the Romanian tourism slogan, "The Land of Choice" (http://m.ziare.com/basescu/poreclele-politicienilor-romani-761633); *Taurul din*

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Certeze (‘the bull from Certeze’, Gheorghe Ciocan): some claim that the nickname of the former president of the Social Democrats from Satu Mare refers to the fact that he was involved with many women in his youth, whereas others believe the nickname is suggestive of the politician’s “assets” (see http://romanicablues.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/prin-menajerie-fara-menajamente/).

4.3. *Mixed semantic fields*: the semantic field from which an appellative is taken refers – explicitly or implicitly – to the remarkable event that led to the establishment of a certain nickname in relation to a particular referent:

• *Simple appellative*:

a) *Physical features*: *Bunicuţa* (‘the granny’), *Tataia* (‘the granddad’) (Ion Iliescu): he received this nickname due to his old age (see http://www.wowbiz.ro/stii-de-unde-i-se-trage-lui-ion-iliescu-porecla-de-e2809cbunicutae2809d-era-un-nume-de-cod_71017.html); *Chioru* (‘the one-eyed’, Traian Băsescu): he was called this due to a flaw in one of his eyes; *Mustăţi* (‘whiskers’, Ioan Oltean): he got this nickname because he wears a moustache;

b) *Psychological features*: *Alifie* (‘ointment’, Radu Mazăre): the nickname refers directly to the hair gel that Mazăre used to wear when he was a deputy and that is believed to have led to his growing bald (see http://www.ziare.com/basescu/stiri-traian-basescu/politicienii-romani-au-porecle-traznite-de-la-captain-planet-la-alifie-267559); *Almanahe* (‘almanacs’, Marian Vanghelie): an incorrect plural form of the noun *almanah* (‘almanac’); the nickname expresses the former mayor’s poor schooling: “I heard some nice guys from certain ministries talking on the television and I invite them to go to hell and work or read some almanacs” (http://www.realitatea.net/politicieni-si-poreclele-lor_82563.html); *Arogantul* (‘the arrogant’, Adrian Năstase): this is how the former prime minister was and still is perceived (see http://www.evz.ro/cristian-preda-iliescu-cunoscut-mai-mult-pentru-poreclele-date-are-o-influenta-subteran-966270.html); *Asteluţei* (Cristian Adomniţei; a pun on the politician’s family name, based on the diminutive noun *steluţă* ‘little star’): “he was nicknamed thus due to the unpardonable mistake regarding the fifteen little stars found on the European Union flag” (http://www.ziarulatac.ro/eveniment/gafa-ca-in-filmele-cu-prosti-a-liberalului-adomnitei); *Bacşiş* (‘tip, baksheesh’, Şerban Mihăilescu): a former senator from the National Union for Romania, who received this nickname from his close acquaintances (see http://www.opiniatimisoarei.ro/ce-porecle-au-unii-politicieni-din-romania-cine-a-auzit-de-bacsis-scorpionul-nelu-mexicanu-sau-guzganul/09/03/2013/); *Baronul* (‘the baron’, Marian Oprişan): in 1996, when he governed the County Council of Vrancea, he was baptised *the baron* (http://www.ziaruldevrancea.ro/politica/58763-politicienii-vrinceni-si-poreclele-lor.html); *Bolşevicul* (‘the Bolshevik’, Ion Iliescu): he was bynamed *the last Bolshevik* by Vladimir Tismăneanu (http://www.contributors.ro/politica-doctrine/despre-ultimul-bolsevic-cand-si-de-ce-devine-nervos-ion-iiescu/); *Dottore* (Italian, ‘doctor’, Victor Ponta): he received this nickname from Traian Băsescu: “On June 13, when the Government ruled the movement of the Romanian Cultural Institute under the president’s symbolic patronage, Băsescu severely criticised Prime Minister Ponta that he had not been informed, not even on the telephone, before the

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Government meeting, about the removal of the Romanian Cultural Institute from the supervision of the head of state, stating that this denoted disrespect and adding: 'When you are a doctor of law, you are the boss, Dottore!'" (http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/bucuresti/Bucuresti-stiri_din_bucuresti-porecle-basescu-antonescu-pointa-felix-dottore-voiculescu-maimutica-pastorul_0_740926003.html); *Goagăl* (based on *Google*; Marian Vanghelie): he was nicknamed this way due to his frequently flawed speech (see http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/politic/vanghelie-am-cautat-pe-gogal-goagal-gagal-google-despre-herodot.html); *Mafiotul* ('the mobster', Radu Mazăre): the former mayor was involved in several suspicious affairs; *Palmolive* (Nini Săpunaru; the politician's surname, *Săpunaru*, is based on the common noun *săpunar* 'soap maker' – hence the nickname): "a nickname accepted by the politician, which is why, during the local election campaign of 2008, Săpunaru was depicted on electoral material holding a bar of soap, under the pretext that, should he be voted, he would 'cleanse' the county" (http://www.ziaruldevrancea.ro/politica/58763-politicienii-vrinceni-si-poreclele-lor.html); *Pleaşcă* ('perk', Theodor Paleologu): "The Minister of Culture, Theodor Paleologu, considers that the Democrat Liberal Party seized power thanks to Traian Băsescu, a 'perk' that was 'won' by the party and helped it come into power" (http://www.gandul.info/politica/theodor-paleologu-basescu-o-pleasca-a-cazut-peste-noi-si-ne-a-adus-la-putere-4002246); *Portofel* ('wallet', Marian Oprişan): "a nickname related to certain ignoble activities with which Oprişan is credited by his opponents, for the period before he got involved in politics" (http://www.ziaruldevrancea.ro/politica/58763-politicienii-vrinceni-si-poreclele-lor.html); *Prostănacul* ('the simpleton', Mircea Geoană): he was harshly reprimanded by Ion Iliescu after losing the presidential elections in 2004: "According to the journal *Adevărul*, the Social Democrat veteran called Geoană a 'simpleton' in a group meeting of the Social Democrat Party" (http://www.realitatea.net/politicieni-si-poreclele-lor_82563.html); *Săniuţă* ('little sledge', Nicolae Văcăroiu): an allusion to the vice of drinking that the former prime minister is said to have; *Schizofrenicul* ('the schizophrenic', Mircea Geoană): a nickname given based on a statement made by Roberta Anastase about the politician: "he makes schizophrenic kind of claims" (http://www.ziare.com/roberta-anastase/mircea-geoana/exercitii-de-schizofrenie-750057); *Tribunul* ('the tribune', Corneliu Vadim Tudor): this politician was a supporter of Romanian specificity, as real tribunes used to be hundreds of years ago;

c) *Occupations*: *Manivelă* ('crank handle', Miron Mitrea): he received this nickname when he was Minister of Transport (see http://www.ziaruldevrancea.ro/politica/58763-politicienii-vrinceni-si-poreclele-lor.html); *Marinarul* ('the sailor', Traian Băsescu): he was given this nickname because, before 1989, he used to be a sea captain of the flagship of the Romanian Merchant Navy; *Matrozul* ('the mariner', Traian Băsescu): *Matroz*, "masculine noun. Sailor; a soldier in the service of the military navy, a marine" (see *DEX online*, *s.v. matroz*, orig. Romanian); *Oierul* ('the shepherd', Gigi Becali): he was called thus by virtue of his basic profession, shepherding; *Piratul* ('the pirate', Traian Băsescu): the former president was initially an authoritarian ship captain.

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• Nicknames obtained by means of *suffixation*:

a) *Diminutive suffixation*[15], which may affect (official) first names/family names or a nickname. Diminutive suffixation of first names is specific to familiar speech and improper in formal contexts of address/reference (and in political discourse, implicitly). At the same time, as regards family names, diminutive suffixation is a linguistic means of indicating the intensity of the attack on a name bearer's "positive face":

Abramburica ('little maker of shambles', Ecaterina Andronescu): she received this nickname as a result of the havoc she created in the education system when she was minister in this field; the verb *a bramburi* ('to create shambles') "to create disorder, chaos, to complicate" (see *DEX online*, *s.v. a bramburi*, orig. Romanian) + diminutive suffix *-ica*. The fact that the expressive force of a diminutive suffix was relied upon in this case reveals the locutor's moderate/playful attitude to penalise the referent's actions through the nickname.

b) *Anthroponymic suffixation*, with specific suffixes acquiring a signifying function:

Agoniseanu (the verb *a agonisi* 'to save, to store' + suffix *-eanu*) (Adrian Năstase), a nickname given based on the considerable wealth that the politician gathered.

• Nicknames obtained by means of *contamination*:

a) *The contamination of a common name/verb/adjective by means of suffixation*: reference to a personality trait/hobby that is representative of the nicknamed individual + the anthroponymic suffix of the bearer's family name:

Vodcăroiu (Nicolae Văcăroiu) (the noun *vodcă* 'vodka' + suffix *-oiu*): an allusion to the vice of drinking, which the former prime minister is said to have; *Trădoiu* (Cătălin Predoiu) (the verb *a trăda* 'to betray' + suffix *-oiu*): he was dubbed so as a sign of disapproval for having defected from the party that established him as a politician; *Moliceanu* (Călin Popescu Tăriceanu) (the adjective *moale* 'soft' + suffix *-eanu*): he received this nickname due to his recurrent display of indecision in critical situations when he was prime minister; *Răzgândeanu* (Călin Popescu Tăriceanu) (the verb *a se răzgândi* 'to change one's mind' + suffix *-eanu*): the nickname is the result of the referent's hesitation to take a stand on the stage of politics; *Slăbiceanu* (Călin Popescu Tăriceanu) (the adjective *slab* 'weak' (character-wise) + suffix *-eanu*) (see above); *Motocicleanu* (Călin Popescu Tăriceanu) (the noun *motocicletă* 'motorcycle' + suffix *-eanu*): the nickname holder is known for his passion for motorcycles.

b) *The contamination of a first name/family name/acronym with an appellative*, in view of obtaining certain stylistic effects, such as euphony or preserving the initial euphonic pattern:

Crivăţ Antonescu (Crin Antonescu; *crivăţ* 'crivetz'), *Troian Băsescu* (Traian Băsescu; *troian* 'snowdrift'), *Emil Bocnă* (Emil Boc; *bocnă* 'frozen to the marrow'), *Triţă Burniţă* (Triţa Făniţă; *burniţă* 'drizzle'), *Troian Frigaş* (Traian Igaş; *troian*

[15] "Diminutives become expressive through the contrast created between the construction regularly used as an endearment and the pejorative discursive context in which the term is employed, thereby suggesting the idea of 'smallness' or 'childishness'" (Milică 2011: 137, orig. Romanian).

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'snowdrift' + *frig* 'cold'), *hErBA* (Elena Băsescu; with reference to illegal herbs), *Frison Iliescu* (Ion Iliescu; *frison*, noun, 'chill'), *Viscol Ponta* (Victor Ponta; *viscol* 'blizzard'). Pragmatic effects may also be sought: in the aforementioned examples, the appellative infiltrated in the proper name is taken from the semantic field of cold (therefore being suggestive of the authorities' inability to handle the yearly winter problem of cleaning the roads of snow or reminding one of Traian Băsescu's famous statement "Iarna nu-i ca vara" 'Winter is not like summer'). The appellative may also be related to the semantic field of illicit/prohibited deeds: *hErBA* – an allusion to illegal herbs, to drugs.

c) *Appellative + modifier*:

Bătrânul Edec ('old towline', Ion Iliescu): a nickname given by Traian Băsescu to the honorary president of the Social Democrat Party, whom he addressed using a specifically nautical term: "Old towline" (http://www.realitatea.net/politicienii-si-poreclele-lor_82563.html);

Captain Planet (Traian Băsescu): "a nickname attributed by one of his [*i.e.* Traian Băsecu's] former colleagues from the Democrat Party, because the president used to give them orders as if he were ruler of the planet and he would get involved in every international problem, creating the impression that Romania was some great global economic power" (http://www.ziare.com/basescu/stiri-traian-basescu/politicienii-romani-au-porecle-traznite-de-la-captain-planet-la-alifie-267559 – orig. Romanian);

"Copilul bătrân al lui Gabriel Garcia Marquez" ('Gabriel Garcia Marquez's eldest child') – Crin Antonescu (Cristian Teodorescu) (see http://www.realitatea.net/victor-ponta-si-crin-antonescu-personaje-comice-din-literatura_773128.html);

Domnul Profesor ('Professor', Dan Voiculescu): the phrase used by his subordinates, the employees of Intact Media Group, to address their former manager and former president of the Conservative Party, one of the most controversial figures in post-totalitarian Romanian public space, currently imprisoned;

Domnul Şantier ('Mr Working Site', Adriean Videanu): when Videanu was mayor of the Capital, most of the deadlines regarding the replacement of kerbstones were long overdue (see http://www.ziare.com/basescu/stiri-traian-basescu/politicienii-romani-au-porecle-traznite-de-la-captain-planet-la-alifie-267559);

Mătuşa Tamara ('Aunt Tamara', Adrian Năstase): the former prime minister claimed he became rich as a result of an inheritance he had been left by a poor aunt;

Micul Titulescu ('Little Titulescu', Victor Ponta): a nickname given by Adrian Năstase to the former prime minister in 2002, when Năstase noted that Ponta resembled Nicolae Titulescu from the side (see http://www.ziare.com/basescu/mircea-geoana/competitie-stransa-intre-geoana-si-basescu-la-porecle-politice-963896);

Piticu' atomic, *Piticul nesimţit* ('the atomic dwarf', 'the rude dwarf', Emil Boc): the former prime minister was short yet very energetic and loquacious;

Războinicul luminii ('the warrior of light', Gigi Becali): a nickname that Becali gave himself. Gigi Becali went through many phases and even called himself "the warrior of light": "'I read the *Manual of the Warrior of Light* two highlighters

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in hand. I used yellow to underline the fragments I liked and those in which I identified myself with the hero of the book, and green to mark the parts that I did not like or read'" (http://www.famouswhy.ro/citate/am-citit-manualul-razboinicului-luminii-cu-doua-markere-cu-galben-am-subliniat-pasajele-care-_q5.html);

Regele bordurilor/Bordură ('the king of kerbs'/'kerb', Adriean Videanu): former mayor of the capital city, accused of getting rich fraudulently after conducting some massive roadworks consisting of replacing kerbstones in Bucharest;

Senatorul Vidanja ('Senator Scoop', Jan Vraciu, former senator for the count of Vrancea): he received this nickname based on a "smelly" business that he carried out some years ago (see http://www.ziaruldevrancea.ro/politica/58763-politicienii-vrinceni-si-poreclele-lor.html);

Ultimul Sauron ('the last Sauron', Traian Băsescu): Ludovic Orban compared Traian Băsescu to the evil character Sauron in the film *The Lord of the Rings*: "The president is the last Sauron that governs this land of darkness. You cannot govern the country with trolls, mammoths and orcs" (http://www.ziare.com/basescu/stiri-traian-basescu/politicienii-romani-au-porecle-traznite-de-la-captain-planet-la-alifie-267559);

- Nicknames obtained by *mixed means*:

a) *Aneu* (Adrian Năstase), obtained as a result of the nominalisation (transformation into a proper name) of the acronym *ANL* (*Agenţia Naţională pentru Locuinţe* 'National Housing Agency'), a programme for the building of housing for young people, initiated by Adrian Năstase while he was prime minister. In the construction of the nickname, the first two letters of the acronym were used, *An*, + *-u*, a morphological ending that is specific to Romanian masculine nouns in the singular form => *Aneu*. The *acronymisation of anthroponyms* annuls the individualising function of a name, which only acts as a distinctive name sign; by means of acronymisation, a named object is (self-)camouflaged.

b) *Căcărău* ('pooper'), one of the latest nicknames of Crin Antonescu, probably the most suitable one, should we take into consideration the narrative "etymology" found for the aforementioned appellation by the journalists from "Academia Caţavencu" ('The Caţavencu academy'), a humorous periodical:

> 10 AD: In the area where the present-day city of Tulcea is found, Gheo, the one bynamed Pooper I, was born. According to documents of the day, the mythical ancestor of the Pooper clan would be the Sandman himself. Moreover, it would seem that the founder of the Pooper Dynasty was much too lazy to call himself Gheorghe. Additionally, Gheo's idleness was so advanced that, even when Saint Andrew came to Dobrogea (Dobruja) to Christian him, he was sleeping. 1848: Crin Laurenţiu Pooper II, a great Forty-Eighter, slept during the entire Revolution. 1959: George Crin Laurenţiu Pooper was born under the zodiac sign of Virgo; he is the first representative of the dynasty to bear three first names. At his birth, the fairy godmothers foresaw his brilliant future: he would get the privilege to sleep an entire month at Cotroceni Palace (http://www.academiacatavencu.info/politic/exclusiv-iata-genealogia-clanului-cacarau-15875).

- Nicknames in *Romglish* (Romanian + English):

Sulaina Cenăl ('Sulina channel', Traian Băsescu): "In 2006, the Cotroceni leader talked to the participants in a Paneuropean conference on inland navigable waters about the 'Sulaina cenăl' – the Sulina channel – and said he wanted to be 'les

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tehnişăn ănd mor politişăn', that is, a politician rather than a technician" (http://www.gandul.info/politica/the-ducks-come-from-the-trucks-pe-sulaina-cenal-cu-aviara-gripa-de-ce-insista-conducatorii-sa-se-faca-de-ras-in-limbi-straine-cititi-aici-explicatia-lui-ion-iliescu-4438675);

Aviara Gripa (mock Latin form of the Romanian phrase for 'avian influenza'; Emil Boc): "The politician joined the longer ranks of great Romanians with poor knowledge of *linguae francae*. The prime minister was not cornered or tongue-tied, but wanted to have a light conversation with the new executive manager of Nokia, who was visiting the Government for more touristic reasons. 'Yes, but you know, aviara gripa', the head of the Government was heard saying on the film recorded by the official cameraman and posted on the Executive's webpage. The foreign official probably understood that the 'Anglophone' Boc wanted to ask about the 'flu' (Romanian *gripa*), so he smiled and answered amusedly: 'I'm very healthy!'" (http://www.gandul.info/politica/the-ducks-come-from-the-trucks-pe-sulaina-cenal-cu-aviara-gripa-de-ce-insista-conducatorii-sa-se-faca-de-ras-in-limbi-straine-cititi-aici-explicatia-lui-ion-iliescu-4438675);

The ducks come from the trucks (Ion Iliescu): "Only a few years ago, the former Romanian president Ion Iliescu managed to surprise the audience on the occasion of a summit in Istanbul. Iliescu was trying to explain to attendees the route that drugs follow from Central Asia to Europe, via Romania: 'The ducks come from the trucks', but succeeded in puzzling the audience by placing ducks in the path of the drugs – ('The drugs come in trucks' was what Iliescu had tried to explain)" (http://www.gandul.info/politica/the-ducks-come-from-the-trucks-pe-sulaina-cenal-cu-aviara-gripa-de-ce-insista-conducatorii-sa-se-faca-de-ras-in-limbi-straine-cititi-aici-explicatia-lui-ion-iliescu-4438675).

5. Conclusion

The study of the linguistic structure of the nicknames recorded has allowed for the formulation of some concluding remarks, as follows:

5.1. A nickname is the verbal expression of a locutor's subjective attitude, which most often refers to undermining the social role of the political actor targeted: "[…] Nicknaming carries a verdictive force: it judges, assesses, or ranks" (Adams 2009: 84). The removal of the nicknamed individual from the self-constituted public status is achieved linguistically, as already shown, by means of distortions/ mutilations/aggressions/substitutions/annihilations of the official name, and psychologically, by triggering in receivers (*i.e.* nickname users) (at least) the effect of ironising, ridiculing and mocking the social figures incriminated;

5.2. Nicknaming is manifested as a verbal reaction expressing the chastisement of an attitude that does not tally with the personal semiotic code of the nickname giver[16] and, if the nickname is acknowledged on the national level, with an entire code of sociocultural behaviours;

[16] Tsepkova (2014: 393) noticed a similar situation as regards nicknames of Russian politicians, concluding that, in this field, "nicknames disclose a negative attitude to the patterns of behaviour typical of this sphere" (Tsepkova 2014: 402).

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5.3. A nickname sets a particular element apart from a series of items that are singularised exclusively from an onomastic perspective and foregrounds that element's specific difference through the function of *characterisation*;

5.4. As a speech act, nicknaming fulfils several communicative functions:

5.4.1. A nickname is in "accordance" with the dominant features of a certain (formal/informal) language register;

5.4.2. A nickname creates the identikit picture of a politician (it summarises the history used as a basis for compiling a nicknamed individual's "nominal record") (*cf.* biographical record), by which s/he will be remembered in the collective memory);

5.4.3. A nickname is an (extra)onomastic interface, which glues/fixes an individual onto its characteristics (initial individual perception, followed by collective perception, in the case of the consolidation (*i.e.* assimilation/recognition) of a nickname by the community). Thus, the constitutive (inherent) features of the bearer fade, as s/he remains in public consciousness only as the "beneficiary" of the (behaviourally) descriptive name.

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Abstract

Due to the ever-increasing relaxation of strategies of address in post–1989 Romanian public space, one can notice the transfer of colloquial means of addressing/ identifying referents from the register of informal communication to the sphere of formal communication.

As opposed to actual, conventional proper names, which, as linguistic signs, are arbitrary in relation to a signifier's "mental impression" (*i.e.* the signified), nicknames are not merely extralinguistically motivated, but also semantically anchored in the histories that generate these verbal tags. Concretely, we will prove that nicknames are proper names that are likely to develop a significational dimension. The understanding of a nickname is not limited to the level of language (as a system); its (correct) interpretation is properly carried out only with reference to the pragmatic level (of speech).

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