ONOMASTICS (THE TYPE OF THE POLITICIAN AND OF THE DEMAGOGUE) IN THE COMEDIES OF ION LUCA CARAGIALE

Adelina ILIESCU
University of Craiova

Abstract

In this paper, we shall try to analyze two characters from Ion Luca Caragiale's work: the type of the politician and of the demagogue. We shall analyze these characters etymologically and semantically. For this type of analysis, we shall use a dictionary that will include a great part of the names that we have referred to above.

Key-words*: onomastics, proper names, comedy, character, irony*

Résumé

Dans ce travail on va essayer d'analyser deux types appartenant à l'œuvre d'Ion Luca Caragiale: le type du politicien et du démagogue, du point de vue étymologique et sémantique. On va recourir pour ce type d'analyse à un dictionnaire qui comprend une bonne partie des noms auxquels on a fait référence.

Mots-clés: *onomastique, noms propres, comédie, personnage, ironie*

The justification of having chosen this theme can be related to the framing of the characters into types, personalized by language and onomastics – the demagogue, the foolish believer (cuckold), the sycophantic and duplicitous servant, the coquette woman, the confidant, etc.

Pompiliu Constantinescu identified nine types of characters in the comedies of I.L. Caragiale: the foolish believer (Dumitrache, Trahanache, Pampon, Crăcănel), the first lover (Chiriac, Rică, Tipătescu, Nae Girimea), the type of the coquette and adulterine woman, the type of politician and the demagogue (Nae Caţavencu, Farfuridi, Dandanache), the citizen (master Leonida, the winebibber), the office clerk (the candidate), the confidant (Eftimiţa), the raisonneur (Nae Ipingescu, Brânzovenescu), the servant (Pristanda).

We shall analyze the two types that we could capture in Caragiale's work, through which satire is achieved, and which the playwright directs against contemporary society, meaning the politician and the demagogue.

The type of the politician and of the demagogue

Agamemnon (Agamiţă) Dandanache **(Sp, Carag.) –** From the characters of the play, Dandanache (the pickle man) has the most savory appellation, the most commented. G. Ibrăileanu argues that 'it rhymes with the comic softening of the brain through the hilarious diminutive of the terrible name Agamemnon that Trahanache pronounces *Gagamiţă* and that renders the fall into childhood of this soft-witted man; through the notional content and sonority of the word *dandanache =pickle* and *the suffix 'ache'* (a diminutive from Greek, mainly used for proper names), also common

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)

to the name Trahanache and by the sum of all these. And the word *dandana* (pickle, fuss) fits his part in the play: the unexpected change of the deputy candidate, Zoe's despair for having lost the love letter, etc. and moreover, the old pickle with "Bang! To the war!". In the same survey, the critic speaks about the Greek origin of the character by his name and surname, showing that Dandanache lisps (*little bro', ducky, fo'ty-eight*), a fact that represents an argument in favor of the same idea.

I. Constantinescu demonstrates how the psychic automatism is contained in the name**,** by the repetition of the same sounds in the sound body (dan-da-na-che) and how nature argues against the character's significance (the degradation of the name, from Agamemnon to Agamiţă, symbolizes the degradation of the character). Anyway, the caricature intention is obvious: the character has nothing in common with Menelaus' brother (and more likely if the bachelor's name had been Achilles nobody would have been surprised!). A tragic character in the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Voltaire, Agamemnon is now designated to define through negation and contrast.

Aside from the official act (the dispatch from the Center), no one respects his name. *Agamiţă* or worse, *this Gagamiţă* stick perfectly to the character's structure. It is a typically Greek name in Caragiale's work, most of the times vulgarized by the opposition between its referential and connotative meaning; Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae, a hero from *Iliad,* the leader of the Achaean army in the Trojan War. The elements of the compound belong to some incompatible semantic spheres as Agamemnon receives positive heroic connotations, while Agamiţă is depreciatively connoted because of the diminutive sense received. *Agamiţă Dandanache* through the ridiculous diminutive of the name Agamemnon, the vigorous hero of Troy that *Trahanache* pronounces *Gagamiţă* renders the fall into childhood of this decrepit man. The depreciative connotation of the name Agamiţă also includes an aggravating shade: "Give me that *Gagamiţă* in writing, so I will not forget his name!" - Trahanache asks Tipătescu (Sp, act III, scene IV), a sign that, after having caught Caţavencu with "another bigger blunder", not even the fact that Dandanache had been imposed from the center has any relevance for him, this way, the character remaining only with the label of nuts – a fact which would be demonstrated copiously in the scenes II and III from act IV. The fact that Agamiţă would have shown himself more scoundrel than Caţavencu in terms of political blackmail simply offers strength to that label which intertwines, like in a curse, on the coordinates of the same destiny, the worthless heroism and the prank of nature, the trouble and the pickle of Dâmboviţa. *Dandanache* is a derivative formed with the suffix *–ache* from *dandana* "unpleasant accident, annoyance, trouble feast, topsy-turvy" (DLR, 200); *dandanaie*, a version of *dandanaie* "caper, mischief" (DNFR, 165). Caragiale made *Farfuride* a Greek only by using a suffix. *Dandanache* is made a Greek by name and surname. He is less Romanized than *Farfuride*.

***Iordache Brânzovenescu* (SP, Carag.) –** *Brânzovenescu* is a derivative from *Brânzoveanu (<Brânzoveni< Cheese< Cheese name)* + suff. *-escu*. *Iordache Brânzovenescu* and *Farfuridi* form together *a comic couple* both by their behavior and by their names that are related to the culinary art. Therefore, the names of Brânzovenescu and Farfuridi suggest the lack of any political qualities.

Physically, it is unknown how Brânzovenescu looks like; but, it seems that the directors have imagined him, in most of the cases, as Farfuridi's opposite. Thus, the

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)

following picture was stated in public performances: a strong Farfuridi and a thin-gutted, tiny, hesitating Brânzovenescu, crushed by the former's presence and personality.

Even in terms of clothing the two characters have found their commenters: 'what leads the heroes of Caragiale in their clothing choices is, above all, *pretension*. One time, the author tells it directly: at the end of *The Lost Letter*, together with 'other cleaner electors', Farfuridi and Branzovenescu appear 'in provincial pretension suits'[1]. The idea of kitsch, uniformity, formal obedience to certain rules already verified is also felt in the aspect of the characters. And then, through his social and political status, Brânzovescu must fit in this blanket without excrescences.

***Nae Caţavencu* (Sp, Carag.)** *Nae* is a hypocoristic form of *Nicolae,* becoming through excessive use, synonymous with *stupid* (Graur, NP, 156). *Caţavencu* < *caţaveica* (rural coat) + suff. *–encu* (> Slavonic *–enku*). His name suggests demagogy if we relate it to the appellative "*hellcat*" or to the verb *a căţăi,* meaning "to tittle-tattle". The sense of *caţă* is also found in the text when the character is characterized as 'lively and barking'.

From an anthropological point of view, the character is "privileged". He belongs to a category with inconceivable names, a fact that brings with itself the importance of the character (only the expletive characters that are not emphasized have common names: Ionescu, Popescu). The demagogy of Caţavencu is announced even before the appearance of the character, by the name "with its sharp syllables and ridiculous profile (that) renders perfectly the demagogue *latrans*".[2] The others speak to him in the most various ways, according to the situation or according to the degree of intimacy: the priest Pripici caresses him ("Bury me, my soul, bro', do not read!"), Pristanda speaks impersonally about him ("the back windows of Mr. Nae Catavencu") or treats him obsequiously and begs for intimacy ("Forgive me, master Nick!"), Tipătescu is ironic, formal ("beloved Mr. Caţavencu") until he loses his temper ("Let's forget about the phrases, uncle Catavencu!") and the Citizen -in his typical manner- graces him with a "S'r (sir) Nae!" that seems to fit him best.

***Tache Farfuridi* (Sp, Carag.) –** *Tache* is a hypocoristic form of *Dumitrache*. Cf. also the Bulgarian *Take,* Greek *Taki(s),* Italian *Tacchi* (DNFR, p. 440) or *Tache<Costache, Panaitache, Petrache* (Graur, NP, 60).

His name approaches the name of Iordache Brânzovenescu by their *culinary* allusion that suggests, as Ibrăileanu had remarked "inferiority, vulgarity and flunkeyism"[3]; then, they got closer by their political beliefs. It becomes obvious that they are inseparable and go together anytime, anywhere. Farfuridi belongs to the category of unreal, impossible names (next to Trahanache, Caţavencu, Brânzovenescu, Pristanda, and even Tipătescu), unlike Ionescu, Popescu that are real plausible names.

Farfuridi is a derivative from *farfara* (whiffler) with the suffix *–dis. Farfara* is formed from the appellative *farfara* (babbler, gossiper) and considers the nature of

[1]Ştefan Cazimir, *I.L. Caragiale faţă cu kitschul,* Bucureşti, Editura pentru Literatură, 1988, p. 98.

[2]G. Ibrăileanu, *Numele proprii în opera comică a lui Caragiale*, in *Opere III*, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1976, p. 69.

[3]G. Ibrăileanu, *Numele proprii în opera comică a lui Caragiale*, in *Opere III*, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1976, p. 48.

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)

the personage (DNFR, 194). The suffix of the name *Farfuridi* denotes its Greek origin. By its name, the character is "the representative of the lawyers at the time of Caragiale, assiduous defenders of the party or the political group they belonged to, ready to betray it if their personal interests dictated this - ready to improvise demagogic speeches in which they were shamelessly mixing the people, the country and 'our ancestors' taken as witnesses to their quackeries"[4]. As far as the character's intellectual (in)sufficiency is concerned, the opinions are divided: Farfuridi is a "fool", although "we cannot appreciate (…) the character's stupidity through the cleverness of the viewer; the stupidity of a character can only be measured by the stupidity or wisdom of other characters"[5]. As an ideologist of the party, Farfuridi has a temperate, even cautious attitude. Afraid of "shocks", he actually expresses the principle of the world he lives in.

***Zacharia Trahanache* (Sp, Carag.),** the President of the Permanent Committee, Electoral committee, school committee, Agricultural Committee – *Zaharias* is a theophoric biblical Hebrew name that continues the personal name *Zekharyah,* a compound deciphered "Jahve remembered"; we have old forms attested beginning with the XVI century (DENB, 96). *Trahanache* is a derivative from the Greek *trahanas* "pap" (Graur, NP, 128) + suffix *–ache*. His dominant characteristic is the "ticking" (slowness) remarkably revealed - on one hand - by the illustrious formula, uttered even in his moments of energy: ("Have a little patience!") and – on the other hand - by the name *Trahanache*, derived from *trahana* – a soft dough - and *Zachariah* who takes us to sugary, suggesting old age.

Trahanache comes from the types of classic comedy: the old man, the deceived husband, the fool who lives in good harmony with the traitor, the classical triangle, etc. Therefore, by language and clothing (hat and walking stick), he is part of the old layer where the latest silts have found their place[6].

The part of the character is very important: that of ensuring a certain rhythm to the play. With his endless "have a little patience!", Trahanache postpones, hurries or ingrains a slow motion to the action that sometimes seems to be out of control. As a mental structure, he is the opposite of boss Dumitrache. The latter is characterized by a hardly controlled impulsivity, while Trahanache is the much-tested placidity and compelled to argue against the others[7]. Often compared with boss Dumitrache, Trahanache shares with him, Pampon (Pom-Pom) and Crăcănel (Cratchit) the category of the *cuckold*. Trahanache is a *mixed typology* ,belonging to both the politician and the demagogue type, along with Rică Venturiano, Tipătescu, Caţavencu, Farfuridi, Brânzovenescu, Dandanache.

The same type in the making

***Boss Dumitrache Titircă Bad-Heart* (Nf, Carag.)** – *Jupân* is 1. a courtesy title given in the Romanian Countries to those who held certain dignities or high offices; a courtesy title given to a person, equivalent to "gentleman", "master"; 2. employer, owner (DEX, 551); *Boss Dumitrache* has an honorable social status that makes him

[4]Mircea Tomuş, *Opera lui I.L. Caragiale, I*, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1977, p. 67.

[5]Mircea Tomuş, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[6]Constantin Cubleşan,. *Dicţionarul personajelor din teatrul lui I.L. Caragiale*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2002, p. 267.

[7]Ştefan Cazimir, *Caragiale - Universul comic*, Bucureşti, Editura Pentru Literatură. 1967, p. 99.

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)

feel very proud as he is a *lumberman* (the man who produces or sells lumber) and a *captain* in the civic guard.

Dumitrache is a derivative from Dumitru (< Gr. *Δημήτριος*) + suffix *-ache*. *Titircă* cf. *Titirică* < Polish *Teter*, *Titera* and Bulgarian *Titirinov*. cf. also to the appellative *titirez (spinner)* (DNFR, 453). The name of the character is serious, typical of a person involved in a serious trading business. *Boss Dumitrache* is considered an upstart. In reality, the character is to a lesser extent an upstart (nouveau riche) than he might seem at a first glance. He does not possess that passion to amaze through wealth or culture. His house has "wooden and straw furniture", a modest and inexpensive interior. *Boss Dumitrache* is not one of those who prefer to show up at fashion shows. He is a "merchant", that is, situated on the highest level of the social pyramid of the slum. Compared with Ghiţă Ţircădău, his former brother-in-law, he is a better, more respectable and successful merchant. Trading is a profession based on money, on gain. To succeed in this profession means to produce money. Or, *Boss Dumitrache* is a successful merchant. His greed is best emphasized by his nickname "*Who baptized him Titircă Bad-Heart, baptized him very well!*" (Spiridon).

***Ionescu* (Sp, Carag.)** – is a surname and a derivative from *Ion* (John) + suffix *–escu.* By his name, the teacher betrays his modest extraction, but especially the lack of personality. He is part of those who rise from the lower classes. (Until then *the people* were the bourgeoisie). The two are part of the largest army of the *Ionescu* and *Popescu* that are overcrowding around *Caţavencu* and *Farfuridi*.

***Lefter Popescu* (DL, Carag.) –** The name of the character is suggestive, although it comes from *Elefterie* (*free man*) (Graur, NP, 84); *Lefter* means poor, penniless. *Lefter* is a slangy term used in order to show the precarious material condition of the character. He feeds on the illusion that he could get rich unexpectedly, although initially he shows himself distrustful of his chance to win, pessimistic, according to his own confession: "You've found it! Me and the luck!" (self-characterization). *Popescu* is a common name that shows the character's mediocrity. *Lefter Popescu* is addicted to the lottery. Once he has lost his money, job and hope, he becomes out of pocket, *Lefter Popescu*. His first name, *Lefter* is filled with the signification of his adventures. Up to that moment ridiculous, the union of the two names gets now a tragic resonance: he is from all the points of view, on the rocks[8]. Al. Rosetti, B. Cazacu, Liviu Onu[9] order *Lefter* "among the loans due to the impulse that the Greeks gave to our commercial life". *Lefter*, "without any penny/dime", has established itself as a familiar term in the language of card and poker players, for example in the phrase "to leave someone dead broke" or "to get somebody' s money to the last penny". *Lefter* gave rise to a derivative: the noun *lefterie* that evolved to the sense of "credit, trust, consideration, authority". *Lefterie* has suffered a semantic movement, becoming a synonym of "honesty", "moral (credit)".

***Nae Ipingescu* (Nf,Carag)** – Nae is a hypocoristic form of Nicolae, made, due to its excessive use, synonymous with *stupid* (Graur, NP, 156). *Ipingescu* is a derivative of the appellative *ipingea* "a man's coat made of baize or cloth (hooded and with chenille) or "the fabric of which the garment described above is made" (DLMR, 394). *Nae Ipingescu* has nothing to do with lower tailoring (*ipingea*) or shoemaking

[8]Gh. Tohăneanu, *Lefter Popescu*, in Orient latin, no. 1 (58), 2008, Timişoara, anul XIII, p. 11.
[9]*Istoria limbii române literare*, vol. I, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, p. 439.

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)

(*pingea*); on the contrary, it suggests a common occupation and imbecility. *Nae Ipingescu* is a bailiff, political friend of the captain from the civic guard, *Titircă Dumitrache*. In this double quality, he participates directly, being a permanent presence in the house at 6 Catilina Street and being indirectly the lumberman's confident, in the life of the Dumitrache family. To him will the jealous husband trust the adventures from the Iunion garden, the doubts about Veta and will describe "the vagabond employee", Rică Venturiano. He participates in the night tours of the guard with his friend and is a witness to several scenes between Ziţa, Titircă's sister-in-law and her ex-husband, Ghiţă Ţircădău. He is the first that recognizes "the citizen, Rică Venturiano, a judicial employee, a student at the Academy and editor at *The Voice of the National Patriot*".

Spiridon (Nf, Carag.) – the name has a Greek origin *Σπυρίδων* < *σπυρίς, -ιδος* "little bread basket", arrived at us through a Slavonic and Neo-Greek branch (MEO, 260). It is a serious name, chosen by Caragiale, along with *Boss Dumitrache*, as they are attributed to some people who have a serious trading business. Spiridon is the youngest character of the play. He is a child or, in the best case, a teenager. All the other characters patronize him, and when, finally, the real identity of Rică is revealed, it can be seen that everybody establishes an equal to equal relationship between them, except Spiridon who remains in the same inferior position where he was placed from the beginning. There is no physical data related to his appearance. All that we know is that he smokes. This vice is both his pleasure and his fear.

In conclusion, the name can characterize the types from the point of view of their nature or of the social classes that they belong to. Therefore, the characters are human types, of a classical style, having as a dominant feature a trait to which other features are subordinated, because the characters, although typical, are not realized schematically, but seen in their complexity

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Academia Română, *Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1998.

Candrea, I.-A., *Dicţionarul limbii române din trecut şi de astăzi*, partea I, Bucureşti, 1926-1931

Caragiale, I. L., *Opere 2, Momente, schiţe, note critice*, Bucureşti, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură şi Artă, 1960

Caragiale, I. L., *Opere 1-4*, ediţie critică de Al. Rosetti, Şerban Cioculescu şi Liviu Călin, Bucureşti, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură şi Artă şi Editura pentru Literatură, 1959-1965

Cazimir, Ştefan, *Caragiale – universul comic*, Editura pentru Literatură, Bucureşti, 1967

Constantinescu, N.A., *Dicţionar onomastic românesc* (DOR), Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1963

Cubleşan, Constantin (coordonator), *Dicţionarul personajelor din teatrul lui I.L. Caragiale*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2002.

Graur, Al., *Nume de locuri*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1963

Ibrăileanu, G., *Numele proprii în opera comică a lui Caragiale*, in *Opere III*, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1976

Ionescu, Christian, *Mică enciclopedie onomastică*, Bucureşti, Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1975 (MEO).

Iordan, Iorgu, *Dicţionar al numelor de familie româneşti* (DNFR), Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983

Iordan, Iorgu, *Toponimia românească*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1963

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)

Pătruţ, I., *Nume de persoană şi nume de locuri româneşti*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1984
Pătruţ, I., *Onomastică românească*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1980
Tomuş, Mircea, *Opera lui I.L. Caragiale, I*, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1977.

BDD-A30417 © 2019 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:37 UTC)