Diachronic classification of bynames given by adults, and bynames given by young people

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Abstract: This paper aims at providing a diachronic and contrastive approach of bynames given, on the one hand, by adults and, on the other, by young people. Starting from the relationship that can be established between the meaning of a structure used as a name and its bearer, the study proposes a classification of the onomastic material analysed, underlining the possibility of bynames to turn in time into family names. In this context, the research deals with the manifestation of the principle of semantic motivation and the peculiarities that name-giving develops from this perspective on the level of each of the age group mentioned.

Keywords: first name, family names, byname, naming motivation.

Introduction

In one and the same language and culture, there are different systems of personal-name-giving. Well-known to everybody is the anthroponymic system used by adults in villages. This is probably a universal phenomenon, although we may find a lot of variation within these adult systems. For example, in Western Europe we use an anthroponymic system consisting of official first names and family-names, drawing on a stock of what I call 'proprial lemmas' (or: onymic dictionary entries) (see Brendler and Brendler 2007). Especially in villages, we can also see the use of unofficial names, i.e. nick- or bynames. First names are taken from an ever expanding stock of first name lemmas, such as *John* and *Mary*. Family-names have been officially inherited since Napoleon's Civil Code, still on the basis of the father's name in most countries. Historically, family-names mostly go back to first names, place names, or bynames. As these surnames have become fixed and fossilized, new bynames have been coined. Note that these adult bynames display meanings and motivations that are similar to those of the fixed family-names.

For the diachronic classification of adult bynames, and family-names, I have been using a twofold parameter: the initial class and meaning of the word, and the naming motivation, i.e. the relation of the word-meaning to the name-bearer. Take the pattern [first name + surname], e.g., *John Fox*. The surname *Fox* (Rumanian *Vulpe*) can be analyzed as follows. Concerning word class and meaning, we have an animal name. In itself, this does not say much about the motivation. This is provided by the relation between *John* and *Fox*. John could resemble a fox or hunt foxes. In this motivational semantics, metaphor and metonymy are frequent. I take the motivation as the main criterion for classification (cf.

Van Langendonck 1996; 2007). First, I'll deal with adult family-names, then compare this system with juvenile naming.

Adult family-names

The main dichotomy in the classification of adult family-names is between relational and characterizing names. I'll skip the different stages that all these names have gone through, but focus on the earliest stage, as is common practice.

Relational name-giving

In general, the motivation of relational naming can be captured by the meaning of the genitive case, or the basic sense of the English prepositions *of/from* (compare for German: Goossens 1999: 24–25). Here, the name-bearer has a fixed, objective relationship with a different entity, a person or family, a place, a parish, or even a patron saint. There is a binary relation in that the name-bearer belongs to some other entity, for instance, a son belonging to his father. In other words, such binary relations are not features of the name-bearers as such.

I see three major subclasses:

(1) Names referring to a familial relationship, such as father – son, or husband – wife;

(2) Local bynames, relating to a place or space, e.g., (the person from) *Westmoreland, Windsor, Heath*;

(3) Names with an ecclesiastical basis, where a patronymic goes back to the name of a patron saint, as in French surnames like *Saint-Martin*.

Names referring to a familial relationship

Names referring to a familial relationship are mostly of the origin type father-child, e.g., eng. *Peter-s,* with a genitive *–s,* or *John-son* 'son of John'. The underlying lemma is a first name. These surnames constitute the well-known patronymics. In Dutch, we find similar constructions, e.g., with genitive *–s*, as in English, or derivations in *–sen, –se*, which are reduced forms of *sone, soen* 'son', as in *Peeter-s, Geert-s, Jan-sen, David-se.* Later on, we sometimes find the preposition *van* 'of/from', as in *Van Geert.* In Rumanian, family-names derived from patronymics often end in *–escu*, as in *Ionescu, Constantinescu*. Much less frequent are matronymics**,** in Dutch often displaying the feminine ending *–en,* as in *Mariën* 'Mary's child'. In the case of patro- and matronymics, the relation can be termed 'origin'.

Another familial relation is to be found in surnames like *De Oom* 'the uncle', and *De Neef* 'the nephew'. Formerly, the kinship term *oom* could also designate a 'grandfather', or a 'brother-in-law'. A *neef* 'nephew' could also be a grandson. So, mostly, we can speak of 'origin', but not always. Using the term 'origin' is inadequate in instances where a wife is called after her husband, but there is a familial relation. Sometimes, this relation is reversed: the surnames *Saereman(s)* and *Anneman(s)* originally mean 'Sarah's man, and 'Ann's man'. Of course, when these names have this sense, you cannot call them matronymics, so the notion of origin is inadequate here. Hence, my general term 'familial relation'.

Local bynames

Local bynames relate a person to a place or space, and go back to different underlying forms that refer to larger places such as countries, less larger ones like cities and towns, or dwelling-places. The underlying forms differ. For countries or regions, inhabitant names or ethnonyms were used; for cities and towns, we find toponymic names, often prefixed by a preposition, at least in Dutch and French. Prepositions could also be used for names deriving from dwelling-places.

i) When people came from a bigger place, such as a country or region, *inhabitant names or ethnonyms* were used: *De Vlaeminck* 'the Fleming', *De Wael* 'the Walloon', *D'Hollander* 'the Dutchman'. In Rumanian, we find *Moldovan* 'the Moldavian'.

ii) The origin could refer to a city, town, or village. We can call them *toponymic names*. The name of George Washington comes from the homophonous toponym. In turn, this president's name gave rise to that of an American state as well as that of the United States' capital. In Dutch surnames, we still find the preposition *van* 'from', as in *Van Mechelen, Van Aken*. Another possibility of rendering this kind of origin is the addition of *–man*: *Brusselman(s)* 'man from Brussels'.

iii) The third kind of names goes back to appellatives denoting dwelling-places, e.g., English *Field, Heath*. In Austria and Switzerland, dwelling-place surnames appear to be typical, e.g., names in *–er,* such as *Hofer* 'farmer', or prepositional phrases like *Zumbach* 'at the brook' (Nübling and Dammel 2007: 147). In Dutch, again the original preposition *van* could occur, but also other prepositions, such as *uit* 'out of', *in* 'in', or *op* 'on'. These are often followed by the definite article, e.g., *Vandevelde* 'from the field', *Vanderheyden* 'from the heath', or with *vander* contracted to *ver*: *Verheyden* 'from the heath', *Opdenbosch* 'on the bush', *Indestege* 'in the lane', *Uyttebroeck* 'out of the swamp', French *Dupont* 'from the bridge', *Delarivière* 'from the river'. The foregoing instances were formed by a prepositional phrase: [preposition + article + appellative]. This is common practice in French and neighbouring Flemish. Maybe, this French-Flemish area constitutes a kind of so-called 'Sprachbund', where neighbouring languages show similar features. The preposition could be dropped, as in French *Larivière* '(from) the river'. Sometimes, the article disappeared, in Dutch surnames like *Van Dale < Van den Dale* 'from the valley'. As in toponymic names, the suffix *–man* could be added: *Bosman(s)* 'man from the wood', *Bergman(s)* 'man from the mountain'. Finally, all function words disappeared in names of the type *Bos* 'wood', *Berg* 'mountain'. This is what we mostly find in English and German.

Names with an ecclesiastical basis

Names with an ecclesiastical basis, where the patronymic is derived from the name of a patron saint, or a parish, are encountered in French surnames like *Saint-Martin* and *Saint-Michel*. As the late Martina Pitz argues (2007: 222): the high frequency of surnames like *Martin* is out of all proportion to the frequency of the related forenames in the late Middle Ages. By contrast, it squares well with the high frequency of the related patron saints. This fits in with the numerous surnames of the type *Saint-Martin, Saint-Michel, Saint-Paul, Saint-Etienne*, which apparently are mostly not given after a place, but after the patron of the baptismal church in question. As Michel Rateau pointed out to me (p.c.), the

byname might have come from the name of the parish itself. He also found that names of the type *Saint-Martin* could indicate that the name-bearer imitated the pretentious attitude of somebody whose name was already *(de) Saint-Martin*.

Thus, we see that the original lexical status of surnames may differ greatly from the motivation for them. If it is about a pretentious person, the motivation is not relational, but characterizing. Anyhow, these saint names developed into patronymics, and, later on, to family-names.

Characterizing name-giving

The analysis of the two major categories (relation and characterization) reveals a striking difference in perspective. The relational class presents the name-bearer as someone who belongs to some other entity, viz. another person, or a place or space, i.e. the entities do not belong to the name-bearers themselves. By contrast, in the case of characterization, the reverse holds: the name-bearers are presented as the persons to whom something pertains or applies, i.e. they display salient characteristics of themselves. We observe a continuum from activities to physical properties, i.e. from professions, occupations, or other activities, social behavior, social status, personality features, psychological peculiarities, to physical appearance, e.g., *Carter, Smith, Wilde, Brown, Long*, etc. The activity can be unique, as in *de Sjalottendief* 'the shallot thief', a man in my Flemish village who once stole a shallot. But normally, a regular activity is mentioned, such as a profession or other occupation. Depending on the region, the definite article *de(n)* 'the' remained in the name as a mere syllable, again as in French *Lefèvre,* Dutch *Desmet* 'the blacksmith'. Sometimes, an office was referred to: *Meyer* and *De Schout* 'the sheriff'. Other occupations were *De Boer* 'the farmer', *Temmerman* 'carpenter', Rum. *Ciobanu* 'shepherd', etc. The occupation could be less official: *De Jager* 'the hunter', *De Rover* 'the robber'. Certain occupations were indicated metonymically, such as *Tanghe* 'fire-tongs', for a blacksmith. As a rule, this indirectness testifies to less appreciation for the occupation. The metonymy could be a rather vague association. Names like *Bisschop* 'bishop' and *Cardinael* 'cardinal' referred to an occupation the person carried out for these ecclesiastical officers. Further, there are all kinds of habits, usually with a negative connotation: *De Dobbelaer* 'the dicer'. Such habits were often designated by the construction [verb + noun], as in the English surname *Drink-water*. In French, this sounds as *Boi-leau* 'drink the water'. There are also numerous Dutch examples: *Storte-wagen* 'cants the wagon', *Breck-pot* 'breaks pots'. Another habit refers to delocutives, i.e. nicknames referring to habitual sayings of the name-bearer. For instance, a woman in my village was called *Madame Voilà* since she always said *voilà*. In family-names, this analysis is hard to make, except perhaps in *Deogracias* 'thank God'. Certain habits indicate a particular behavior, or psychological characteristics, like: *De Stuyver* 'dust-maker', *Ruysschaert* 'noise-maker', *Kwiek, Rasschaert* 'quick person'. Personality features are: *Dewilde* 'the wild', compare the author's name Oscar Wilde!, *Devroede* 'the wise', or metonymically *Angst* 'anxiety, for an anxious person', and social or religious characteristics: *De Vriend* 'the friend', *Metdepenningen* 'with the pennies, rich' or *Penninck* 'penny, rich', *Hoornaert* 'cuckold', *De Vroom* 'the pious', as against *Dheedene* 'the heathen'. Animal names like *Devos, Fox*, Rum. *Vulpe, Wolf, Dewolf,* Rum. *Lupu* may belong to this category. The least processual characterization consists of

the well-known physical features, exemplified by such names as *Dewit* 'the white', *Delanghe,* Rum. *Lungu* 'the long', *Decorte* 'the short'.

Juvenile bynames

The way in which young people give by- or nicknames, is rather different than the way in which adults bestow bynames on other adults. As a rule, characterization is omnipresent in the system of motivations in juvenile nicknames, whereas relational naming is almost absent. Clearly, young people are more interested in characterizing their comrades or teachers than in finding out where they come from (see also Van Langendonck 1999). This seems to be of all places and times. Every generation of young people uses a similar system. The sociologists Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 89–92) propose the thesis of 'age-grading', implying that individuals go through certain developmental stages in their naming practice. In this case, young people always apply the same mode of name-giving. As these youngsters get older, their language and naming principles change as well. Indeed, adults especially focus on the familial or geographic origin, and the professions of their acquaintances, whilst young people concentrate on external, especially physical characteristics, or on conspicuous behavior, or special personality features (as can be seen in the byname *Hitler*). Pupils manifest themselves as utterly fluent and playful. The bynames they invent are a striking example of these skills. The fantasy of young people seems inexhaustible.

I'll choose some examples from dissertations of my students from the University of Leuven. Geographically, the Flemish material is well distributed, ranging from the North Sea to the German border. The taxonomy divides into four categories: (1) physical traits, (2) psychological and behavioral characteristics, (3) playing with sounds and word-forms, and finally (4), the combination of these sounds and forms with meanings associated with the teachers' family-names.

Physical traits

As the proverb says: *Nobody is perfect*; hence, conspicuous physical traits of teachers are welcome targets.

A few teachers may be good-looking or sexy, hence *Pietje Sex* 'Peter sex', but others get saddled with pejorative names like *Piwi* 'noodle', *Varkentje* 'little pig', *Neanderthaler* 'Neanderthal', *Pinguin* 'pinguin', *Mummie* 'mummy', *Zerk* 'tombstone', *Doodskist* 'coffin', or simply *Lijk* 'dead body'.

Stature or figure is a less harmful motive: there are short and there are tall teachers. So you get: *Klein Duimpje* 'Tom Thumb', *Kabouter* 'goblin, dwarf' for short teachers; but tall teachers are named *Luk Verlengstuk* 'Luke extension piece', *Harry Verlengkabel* 'Harry extension cable'.

Often, pars pro toto is used, just as metaphor and comparisons. Let's look at which body parts are aimed at:

- Hair. White hair: *de Witten* 'the white', *Melkweg* 'Milky Way', and *White Spirit*. Curly hair: *Grijze Wolf* 'gray wolf', or *Schaap* 'sheep', *Kroezel* 'frizzy', and *Poedel* 'poodle'.

- In the case of male teachers, the baldhead is the favorite: *Baby face, Blinkie* 'shiny', *Flitslicht* 'flash-light', or a whole sentence: *De-maan-schijnt-door-de-bomen* 'The moon is shining through the trees'.

- Face and mouth: *Zwijnenkop* 'pig's head', *Paardenmuil* 'horse's mouth', *Rattenmuil* 'rat's mouth'.
- The eyes: *Knipperlicht* 'flashing light'.
- The ears: the inevitable *Flappie* 'flap-ear', *Teletubbie* (from TV), *Dumbo* 'ears like an elephant's'.
- The nose: *de Papegaai* 'the parrot', *Pinocchio.*
- The voice: *Piepertje* 'squeaky', *Brulaap* 'howling monkey', *Schellebelle* 'had a shrill voice (at the same time alluding to the village name)', *Gedroogde Vijg* 'dried fig' (for a dry throat), and *Kippie* (cackles like a hen).
- The legs: *Stekkebeen* 'had thin legs', unlike *Turbokuit* 'with turbo, i.e. big calves'.
- In the case of female teachers, the bosom is a favorite target: *Boobies, Supertet* 'supertit'.

Psychological and behavioral characteristics

Pupils focus on the way in which their teachers teach and take exams, how they behave or are dressed. Mostly, these names are pejorative as well:
- The way of speaking is of course striking, e.g., some teachers produce a lot of saliva in the heat of their argument, and then you get: *Douche* 'shower', *Waterval* 'waterfall', or *Niagara.*
- The make-up behavior (even sometimes of men!) is again an inexhaustible source: *Barbiepop* 'Barbie doll', *Schminkpop* 'make-up doll', *Schminkdoos* 'make-up box', *Stinky Winky, de Vlek* 'the spot' (has two spots), *Karote* 'carrot' (looks orange).
- Clothing: *Markeerstift* 'marker' (was utterly colored), *Shoe Post* (a well-known shoe company; the teacher wore other shoes everyday).

Yet, there are positive senses: gentleness is recompensed with names like: *Watje* 'softie', *Bambi, Fifi.*

Playing with sounds and word-forms

The great strength of byname creation by young people is to be found in playing with sounds and word-forms. As the basis of the byname, they usually take the family-name or sometimes the first name, or even the title of their victim. Then, they unchain all kinds of sound play, such as: shortening, lengthening, rhyme, alliteration, anagrams:
- Shortening: *Ondi* (**on**der**di**recteur, i.e. vice-director), *Wadi* (**wa**arnemend **di**recteur, i.e. acting director), *2–2* (once gave 2 pupils each 2 pages of punishment).
- Even anagrams occur: *de Fats* is normally called *Staf* with his first name.
- Often, we find pure sound play, rhyming like *Pascale Bocal, Johnny Pony.*
- Very frequently, we encounter folk-etymology: the family-name is changed into an existing word without the implication of any further intention or motivation: *Scampi* 'Scampi' (Descamps), *Kwally* (Vanwalleghem, resembling *kwal* 'jelly-fish'), *Master Richárd* becomes *de Sigaar* 'the cigar'.

However, it is not always mere sound play.

Combination of sound and form play with relevant meanings

It is also typical of young people that they combine sound and form play with meanings referring to conspicuous physical or personality features of the teachers. Sounds and forms often resemble those of the first and family names or titles in question. Hence, this is more than mere folk-etymology. Here, surnames are changed in such a way that at the same time another conspicuous physical or personality feature of the name-bearers is highlighted. For instance, *Dikke Deur* 'fat door' was an obese school director. Note the alliteration: twice *D... Kabouter* 'goblin, dwarf' was short and had the resembling family-name *Cabooter. Pierre Vocabulaire* (with rhyme) had the name *Pierre* and taught French. *Knockaert* taught Latin and was named *Knockibus. Stinky Winky* (again with rhyme) used too much perfume; the byname also alludes to *Tinky Winky* from 'Teletubbies'.

Two things should be highlighted. First, this playful name-giving is represented more strongly by boys than by girls. Second, the influence of English and of TV seems pretty clear.

Anglophilia, or the tendency to anglicize bynames, is found almost only in boys. The English influence is not only lexical, but also morphological, as in the typical suffix *–y*, e.g., Master Gillaerts is called *Gilly,* master Lismont *Lizzy*; *Fossaert* is shortened to *Fossie.* A lexical variant is *the Fox. Hubrecht* becomes *Hubie*, Zwartjes 'black' is called *Pekkie* (from *pek* 'pitch'). The abbreviated form in *–y* yields a certain familiarity, and can be interpreted as diminutive or augmentative. On the lexical side, we have nicknames like *Ladyshave, Boobies,* and *Baby face.* The boy *Alien* behaves strangely, like an alien. There are also syntagms: *Fat Boy Smell, White Spirit, Stinky Fox, Black 'n Decker* (is called *Philips*), *Miss Flair, Oma Duck* 'Grandma Duck', and *Calamity Jane.* Names can be partly anglicized, as in: *Reggieboy*; sometimes, they are even translated if the etymology is transparent, as in the case of the family-name *De Maegd,* becoming *de Virgin.*

Conclusions

A few conclusions can be drawn:

(1) The system of motivations in nicknames for Flemish teachers is different from the one of adult nickname-giving. Whilst the latter focuses on familial and geographical origin, and professions, nicknames at school focus on characterization, i.e. the teachers' physical or psychological and behavioral features. Indirectly, this confirms the dichotomy I make in adult bynames, namely between relation and characterization.

(2) Typical of juvenile motivations is playing with sounds and forms, which in a number of cases have some kind of sense.

(3) In this juvenile nicknaming, we see a common feature: sounds and forms, as well as most characterizations, refer to external properties, of the language and of the name-bearers.

(4) These juvenile motivations seem to be of all times and areas according to Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 89–92), who propose the thesis of 'age-grading', i.e. young people apply their own mode of name-giving everywhere and at all times. Of course, anglophilia is typical of our modern times.

(5) There are differences between boys and girls: boys give more nicknames and appear to monopolize the Anglicization of names, often drawing on Anglo-Saxon TV series.

(6) Finally, bynames derive not only from appellatives, but from all possible linguistic sources, including proprial lemmas, constituents, and even sentences.

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