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**ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the function of proper names in different communication situations and social communities. Proper names form an integral part of vocabulary and, along with appellatives, differ according to communication spheres, situations and registers. Attention will also be paid to different uses of the anthroponymic part of proper names in communication as compared with toponymy.

**KEYWORDS**

communication register, register of the individual, register of the group, social group



**Jaromír Krško**

## Proper Names as Part of the Communication Register

Recent sociolinguistic research has focused on factors influencing the function and usage of language as a tool of communication. One such important factor is society and its stratification on various social and professional communities. D. Slančová states that “the more differentiated the society using a particular language is, the more differentiated the language itself is; the more differentiated the communication spheres and the types of communication situations are, the more differentiated the preferential way of expressing closely connected with these spheres and situations is” (Slančová, 1999, p. 93). Individual societies use characteristic lexical units referring to the term register which is defined as “conditionally language behaviour of people connected by their common activity” (Slančová, 1999, p. 96). Register is a term broader than social dialects (slangs, professionalisms, and argots) which is how M. Ološtiak (2011, p. 271) as well as Slančová comprehend it. She defines the dual conception of register as follows: 1. **the sociolinguistic conception of register** is related to the speech varieties of different social groups connected by their common interests and professions whereas the register is not based only on the lexis itself related to the social group and its activity, but also on the usage of idioms or special grammatical constructions (cf. Slančová, 1999, p. 95). Register does not represent the peripheral stratum of language but constitutes an active communication component within the social interactions among members of particular

societies. The complex communication register of an individual comprises many partial subregisters which are dependent on the number and type of social groups which the individual belongs to. Slančová also refers to the active and passive communication registers of an individual where the extent and level the individual masters these registers, points to his/her linguistic experience. This can be shown e.g. in parody, in short scenes imitating other social classes, in jokes, etc. From a sociolinguistic point of view, these communication activities represent playing roles, imitating other than their own social group status which the appropriate register corresponds to.

The repertoire of communication registers of society as the set of all the subregisters of individual members of a group indicates the uniqueness of this group and its dissimilarity to other communities. The unifying elements of social groups into larger units are the same or very similar situational conditions which offer preconditions for creating extremely similar communication registers. The individual's membership in the group is seen in terms of his/her register of a particular social group. Proper names form an integral part of communication register as well. The extent of onymy as the set of all proper names is determined by the needs of naming, identifying and differentiating specifically the objects around the world in which a particular society exists.

Slančová understands register at its 2. **pragmatic level** as well and characterises it as "the ability of people to indicate and change their attitude towards the communication partner by language means. Thus we recognize formal and informal register which is linguistically presented by using different forms of addressing, e.g. formal/informal forms of addressing" (Slančová, 1999, p. 95–96). Within the context of proper names the pragmatic level of register appears e.g. in toponymy when creating toponyms by means of various topolexemes. The pragmatic function is more markedly applied, however, by a person when using hypocoristic forms of anthroponyms as well as zoonyms and nicknames etc. depending on the type of social group and actual mood, etc.

The source of tension between formal and informal anthroponymic communication registers results from the merging of official, semi-official and private onymic systems on the one hand, and varied levels of language contacts (nation-wide level, local level and individual level) on the other hand.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the levels of language contact have been analysed by W. Lubaš at the VII Slovak Conference on Onomastics held in 1976 (cf. Lubaš, 1980; Krško, 2003a, p. 305) where he distinguished individual levels on the basis of hierarchy and labelled them with the letters A, B, C: with the nation-wide level at the highest level, the local level at the lower one and the individual level at the lowest level.

The communicants select particular (as well as appropriate in terms of communication) forms of anthroponyms from their registers and in this way fix their social status and appropriate role in communication. There are situations in which one of the communicants entering a dialogue as the second one does not estimate the intention of his/her communication partner (selection of the language contact and appropriate level) and over the course of dialogue is thus obliged to correct the communication level and select another form of proper noun. V. Blanár states that “integration of proper name into the appropriate onymic subsystem presupposes certain knowledge of a particular individual (as J. Dolník suggests, it is called onymic presupposition).” (Blanár, 1996, p. 162) An example illustrating such a situation might be a reunion of two female classmates from secondary school after many years and introducing a husband to a wife’s former female classmate:

A: Let me introduce you. This is my husband.

B: Krško.

A: This is my former female classmate.

C: Kata.

B: Jaro.

The introduction of both involved coincided with the principles of etiquette whereby the man was introduced to the woman first and the woman was consequently introduced to the man. The man shook the woman’s hand and chose communication level A, introducing himself with his last name. The former female classmate, who was introduced to the man, chose the informal (local) level, however, and introduced herself as *Kata* (*Kate*). Afterwards, the man corrected the communication level and introduced himself with his

first name, but in an unofficial form (*Jaro*, not *Jaromír*), because the woman introduced herself as *Kata* (*Kate*), not *Katarína* (*Cathrine*).

Returning to Slančová and her reference to the repertoire of communication register of a society which is formed by subregisters of particular members of a group, there is a need to take into account, how this fact influences the proper names which are part of the register. From the communicational, functional and pragmatic perspectives, the anthroponymic component part of the register needs to be distinguished from the tomonymic one.

**The anthroponymic register of an individual (ARI)** denotes the set of all anthroponyms and their forms (e.g. hypocoristic forms, nicknames) of all members of social groups to which the individual belongs and which he/she knows. ARI is determined by the existence of social groups within time (where the extinction of the group nominal function of anthroponyms of this group vanishes as well), by the social statuses of members belonging to these groups and by the pragmatic aspects applied in communication on the part of members of societies (see e.g. Krško, 2000, p. 77). ARI as well as the appellative communication register or vocabulary is intrinsically differentiated in subregisters of close persons and subregisters of those who are not closely acquainted. One can actually single out the subregister of persons who do not constitute social groups with the individual (anthroponyms of so-called social or cultural context (see Ološtiak, 2007, p. 188) names of artists, sportsmen, and politicians...).

From birth to death, each person forms a part of various societies: after birth a baby becomes part of a family where it gains the status of a child, sibling and grandchild. Gradually, the scope of societies extends into a nursery, primary school, secondary school and even a university. Within these societies, an individual also exists in various interest groups, then working teams and gains the status of a husband, lover, parent and grandparent. Certain social statuses are inherited (being born into a family with multiple offspring, born as a youngest sibling, as a twin or as the only child) and a number are gained gradually throughout an individual's life: becoming a skilful student eager to assist his/her classmates, obtaining a leading role at work corresponding with the education and skills a person has achieved. All social statuses have the dynamic aspect of status in



common involving a social role to be performed. Each role involves a set of rights, duties, restraints, norms and behaviour which a person has to face and fulfil, along with, of course, a set of privileges.<sup>1</sup> As far as proper names are concerned, the social statuses include different forms of anthroponyms which form the anthroponymic register of the individual.

Being a part of various societies determines an individual's anthroponymic register as it becomes the sum of all subregisters of societies which the individual is a member of.

Very little attention has been focused on analysis of the anthroponymic register of individuals. The emphasis has been primarily placed on research on nicknames in specific social groups, such as the nicknames of students at primary and secondary schools, universities, nicknames in teacher teams or hypocoristic forms of names in a family environment, etc. This means that many attempts have been made to study the **anthroponymic register of the social group** representing the sum of all subregisters of all members within these societies. Members of society are aware of the register referring to their social group. Thanks to the research, for example, conducted at a primary school in Bobrov in 2004, we managed to gain 82 nicknames of 50 members of this social group (cf. Krško, 2006, p. 9). In this case, the anthroponymic register of the group would contain nicknames such as *Sisa* (*Susie*), *Opička* (*Little Monkey*), *Mary* (*Mary*), *Rajo* (*Froyo*), *Simson* (*Simson*), *Deňa* (*Denny*), *Zajac* (*Rabbit*), *Elvis* (*Elvis*), *Párky* (*Hot Dog*), *Buchta* (*Chick*), *Panáčik* (*Sim*), *Žirafa* (*Giraffe*), *Ryšavec* (*Redhead*), *Pavúk* (*Spider*), *Fúzač* (*Shaggy*), etc. Members of a society are not capable, however, of recognising the entire anthroponymic register of each member of a group. Students at university know all their classmates' nicknames, for example, but would not in all probability know the nicknames from the classmates' family environment or village where they live. Students are not even aware of their classmates' nicknames from secondary school or the way they were nicknamed by their grandfather, for example.

1 Roles are defined by status, the status of a child "prescribes" it to obey his/her parents, help with household chores and limit watching late night television shows, etc. The status of a company director "prescribes" him or her to be considerate to customers, dress adequately and communicate with diplomacy and tact.

At present, Internet social networks play a distinct role in indicating the complexity of social interactions and membership of individuals in various social groups. Each member of this network has a friend list which includes various kinds of people: their schoolmates, colleagues, old acquaintances, family, relatives, etc. If someone contacts us and sends a friend request, many social networks provide new members with the opportunity to add certain people from our friend list to their lists. At this moment, a person comes to realise the social stratification of the lists of our virtual friends and even the division of social groups to which he/she belongs. This is why he/she has to be careful when selecting mutual friends with recently signed up friends.

From the social point of view, toponyms are perceived in a different way from the perception of anthroponyms. It is primarily a matter of the emotional and pragmatic aspect in communication where a person is bound with no social ties to (in)animate nature. The emotional connection with the countryside stems from social interaction with a group of people (the community of a village, family bonds, friendship links, etc.).

One can take into consideration both the **toponymic register of the individual (TRI)** and the **toponymic register of the (social) group (TRG)**. The same rules are more or less applied in the process of creating TRI. It is the sum of toponymic subregisters of societies to which the individual belongs. A great deal of attention has been paid to various types of social groups and to the origin of social toponyms in various studies (cf. Krško, 1998a, 1998b, 2003b). Social groups have been divided based on their age, (children, youngsters), family social environment and social groups based on shared interests (hunters, fishermen, sportsmen...). The formation and usage of social toponyms (or as aforementioned, the so-called registers) are carried on in horizontal and vertical directions (see Krško, 2003b, p. 64). Vertically, we can consider TRG not only to the extent of a home village bordered by neighbouring lands, but also the national toponymy closely connected with an ethnic group (as compared with other toponymic systems). This conclusion has been reached in accordance with the definition of social toponyms which are defined as specific place names characteristic for a particular, relatively closed society, with the community of this place differing from neighbouring ones. These type of proper names can be

distinguished by low communication potential (within larger societies), because it refers to quite insignificant geomorphologic objects<sup>2</sup> bound by space and time. Space and time bounds entail that social toponyms exist only in the period of a particular social group's existence and are bound to specific onymic space (cf. Krško, 2003b, p. 64).

To summarise, proper names form an integral part of our vocabulary and go hand in hand with appellatives. They also differ according to communication spheres, situations and registers. Within each individual's register, the anthroponymic and toponymic register of an individual can be thought of. Social anthroponyms and toponyms are used within social groups and form the anthroponymic and toponymic registers of these groups.

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2 It is relative to label or evaluate an object's significance, because sometimes (in not very rugged terrain) any kind of dissimilarity is important (an upland, a valley, different type of vegetation, a shape or a stream of water). In contrast, in rugged terrain only noticeable phenomena are primarily significant. The more detailed the view of the country, the more significant the object becomes.

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