

LINGUO-COGNITIVE PARAMETERS OF BARACK OBAMA'S NICKNAMES

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The study focuses on nicknames of former US President Barack Obama. Nicknames are viewed as markers of subjective evaluation of personal and political profile of the statesman on the part of different participants of the political discourse. Word formation models of Barack Obama's nicknames, their motivational base and prototypicality are among the main issues of research paper.

Keywords: Barack Obama, anthroponym, nickname, word formation, semantics, motivation.

Already in the end of the 19th century, an American poet, essayist, and journalist Walt Whitman in his account on slang in America neatly noted: "What a relief most people have in speaking of a man not by his true and formal name, with a 'Mister' to it, but by some odd or homely appellative" [1, p.433]. Nowadays nicknames are in the focus of interdisciplinary studies within humanities, such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, history, and discourse studies. They accumulate extralinguistic information, put to the fore those characteristics of an individual which the name-giver desires to highlight in a certain context; they are also units of national mentation pertained to linguoculture representatives.

In the preface to the second edition of the renowned lexicographic work *American nicknames. Their origin and significance*, G. Shankle states that Americans use more nicknames than any other peoples as they are given to wives, husbands, children, friends, enemies, etc. "No name is too sacred or base for them to shorten or modify into some affectionate, humorous, or abusive sobriquet. Sometimes they are complimentary, and again they are intended to satirize or caricature those to whom they are given. [2, p. VI].

The **relevance** of the study is determined by the catalysis of global geopolitical processes and salient rise of political consciousness witnessed in the US society in last few decades. Within the frames of these processes, synthesis and verbalization of historical, social, and cultural information occur. Moreover, the problems of nomenclature, structure, and motivational grounding of the informal names given to the supreme leaders lack sufficient coverage in up-to-date onomastics, thus representing the novelty of this study.

Recent research into the topic aim at revealing the potential of nicknames to encode cultural realia, assumptions, and stereotypes of the country's political leader [3; 4], analyzing functions and sources of political nicknaming [5; 6; 7], as well as exposing its use in political discourse [8; 9], etc.

The **subject matter** of the research paper represent informal personal names of the 44th US President Barack Obama; the **scope** of the study covers lingual and cognitive mechanisms of their formation. **Research materials** are represented by a sample of 360 nicknames of Barack Obama obtained from the American blogosphere [10].

The **purpose** of the study is a comprehensive analysis of language means and motivational principles involved into generation of Barack Obama's nicknames.

The **objectives** of the study include: 1) analyzing basic formation mechanisms of Barack Obama's nicknames; 2) identifying motivational images that underlie Barack Obama's nicknames; 3) interpreting cognitive principles of the nicknames functioning in political discourse. To attain the objectives such **methods** of linguistic research as comparative, contrastive, descriptive and typological ones were used.

English vocabulary represents an open language subsystem characterized by extraordinary quantitative and qualitative dynamics of modification. Affixation,

abbreviation, telescoping, word composition, and conversion are the main sources of morphological neology. The rise of semantic neologisms is regulated by the principle of language economy. It checks the quantitative growth of lexical units and promotes secondary nomination that leads to rethinking already existing language nominative means [11, p. 127]. Alongside, politicians' nicknames are one of the most mobile lexical groups as regards of their origin and functioning in socio-political context: they appear rapidly (lately in quantities), function actively for a short lifespan, and swiftly "become things of the past", while only the neatest dwell in people's memory (e.g., *Koba (J. Stalin)*, *Makarych (L. Kravchuk)*, *Yanyk (V. Yanukovych)*, *Lionia-Cosmos (L. Chernovetsky)*, *Zhyrik (V. Zhirinovsky)*, *The Iron Lady (M. Thatcher)*, *Iron Felix (F. Dzerzhinsky)*, etc.).

Like all neologisms, nicknames tend to operate a set of typical ways of word formation. Formally, 11,1% of our nickname sample are simplex and 88,9% are complex (inclusive of compounds and composites). Від 360 Morphemic analysis of the units from the sample proves the dominance of suffixation method in the formation of Barack Obama's nicknames.

Noun suffix *-er* in modern English is distinct in exceptional productivity and is used to form the deverbative stems of concrete nouns to denote a doer of certain action or profession [12, p. 131]. Within the simplex group of the sample 10,3% of Barack Obama's nicknames are formed by means of suffix *-er*. Unlike other typical vectors of semantic references of this suffix, its presence in the word structure of a nickname positions Barack Obama as an active figure on the US socio-political arena. Whereas his coming to the post was primarily viewed as case of "enlightenment" (*The Lightbringer* — "the one who brings light", *The Lightworker* — "the worker of the light"), his further days of presidency were more often marked by the remainders of his crazy youth (*The Choomer* > *to choom* — "to smoke marijuana"), accusations of strengthening "split" in the country (*The Divider* — "the one who separates"), etc.

Suffix *-ist* is often attached to noun stems (less often – to adjectival stems) to form nouns which denote scientific, political movements and theories, as well as people of various professions. The semantic value of the suffix is "a person who deals with something" [13, p. 115]. Nicknames of Barack Obama with suffix *-ist* constitute 1,4% of the sample and usually describe his political actions and views. For example, the nickname *Errorist* views the president as a person disposed to taking wrong decision, whereas the nickname *O-cialist* highlights his socialistic position in policymaking.

Suffix *-ness* is usually attached to the adjective stem and forms abstract nouns [14, p. 439], as in cases of *His Phoniness* or *His Holiness*. Such nicknames of Barack Obama represent 1,1% of the total sample. These units also enter a larger subgroup of composite nicknames formed by the lexico-syntactic model of "bestowing a title" (1,6%): *His O'liness*, *His Phoniness*, *His Travesty*, *His "O"ily-ness*, *His Holiness*. Supposedly, such nicknames echo old dispute in the Senate on the form of addressing the president (among the suggestions were *Your majesty*, *His Patriotic Majesty*, *Your Highness*, etc.) [15, p. 63]. However, we assume these nicknames to be splashes of political sarcasm aimed at exposing monarchical style of Barack Obama's governing along the fact that the USA positions itself as a prime world stronghold of democracy.

Diminutive suffixes *-y*, *-i* and *-ie* found in the structures of *Bammy*, *Barky*, *Obammy*, *Odummy*, *Skippy*, *Sparky*, *Obambi*, *Bambi*, etc. represent 3,3% of the sample. The use of such suffixes marks ironic attitude of the name-giver to the denotatum.

The products of compounding or composition are complex words (also called compounds or composites). This group is one of the most representative within the sample and constitutes 11,6% of its total amount.

Stem-compounding is based on the compounding of two or more stems with possible further modifications of the newly formed composite [16, p. 212]. Most composite nicknames of Barack Obama's are formed by the model "noun + noun" (e.g., *Greasespot*, *Momjeans*, *Lightbringer*, *Lightworker*, etc.).

Word-compounding is the result of combining two or more stems. It occupies a leading place in the English word formation. Fixed order and logical semantic combination should be an indicator of combining words [16, p. 212]. Within the sample following models of composition are found:

1) “noun + preposition + noun” (with variations “noun + noun + preposition + noun” or “adjective + noun + preposition + noun”, etc.): *Asshole-in-Chief*, *Bystander-in-Chief*, *Campaigner-in-Chief*, *Commander-in-Chief*, *Bobblehead-in-Chief*, *Demagogue-in-Chief*, *Pantload-in-Chief*, *Pantywaist-in-Chief*, *Pronoun-in-Chief*, *Scold-in-Chief*, *Usurper-in-Chief*, *Liar-in-Chief*; *Community-Organizer-in-Chief*; *Empty-Suit-in-Chief*, etc;

2) “adjective + noun”: *Purple Lips*, *Big Brother*, *The Manchurian President*, etc;

3) a whole syntactic structure — the so-called complex “syntactic” words: *President No-You-Can't-Have-That-Plan-Because-I-Don't-Like-It or His Imperious Majesty Barack the First*, *President of America*, *Protector of the People as Long As They Know Their Place and Belong to The Right Unions*, *Defender of the Privileges Accrued by Attending the Right University*, and *Scourge of the Rich If They Don't Contribute To The Democratic Party*.

Several nicknames of the 44th US president are formed by means of clipping that a) refers to the process whereby a lexeme (simplex or complex) is shortened, while retaining the same meaning and still being a member of the same form class, b) results in a change of stylistic level, and c) should be distinguished from blending as long as its products preserve compound stress [17], as in cases of *Fraudbama*, *Gaybama*, *Turkmenbama*, etc.

The nicknames formed by means of telescoping (blending) represent a separate group constituting 2,7% of the sample amount. Telescoping is the way of word formation whereby a new word arises through merging of full stem of one word and a shortened form of the second word or merging of shortened stems of the source lexemes [18, p. 420]. Thus, such units as *Maobama* or *ObaMao* refer to the similarity of policymaking styles peculiar to both Mao Zedong and Barack Obama.

Nickname *Obroccoli* is given to the president due to his passion for broccoli, whereas nickname *Snobama* is related to his liking for snow cones (a type of ice shaving topped with flavored sugar syrup).

It is noteworthy that the mechanisms of blending have much in common with compounding. Firstly, free lexical units form the basis for both blendings and compounds. Secondly, in terms of semantics they both represent the cases of univerbation, i.e. condensation of semantic value of both words within one lexical unit. Thirdly, the juxtaposition of stems forms the basis for connection between the components of both composites and blendings [18, p. 422]. Thus, the semantics of the newly coined word completely or partially absorbs semantic values of its source lexical constituents.

Abbreviation as means of word formation is a combination of parts of different words, especially initial letters of a certain word order [13, p. 161] (e.g. *AKOTUS* (*Ass Kicker Of The United States*), *J.E.F.* (*Jug Eared F ****), *OOO* (*Occupant of the Oval Office; a.k.a. "Triple O"*), *SCOAMF* (*Stuttering Cluster **** of a Miserable Failure*), *TOTUS* (*Teleprompter of the U.S.*), *T.F.G.* (*This F *** ing Guy*), etc.). Only names of the most outstanding persons, inclusive of presidents, are subjected to shortening to graphic abbreviations. The reason for this lies in their frequent use political discourse and high public recognizability. Print media and Internet discourse abound in abbreviations as long as they are a conventional and convenient means of information exchange. 2,2% of Barack Obama's nicknames in the sample are abbreviated formations.

Modern language practice benefits from a vast number of different nicknames able to reflect cultural specifics. Such ability is largely predetermined by the motivation principles of nominations, i.e. semantic reasoning that specifies the sound image of the word.

Depending on the source of motivation nicknames fall into two main groups of internally and externally motivated nicknames. These groups significantly differ in formal, semantic, cognitive, pragmatic, and functional aspects [19, p. 106]. In this study we also suggest distinguishing a “synthesis group” that comprises the units featuring both internally and externally motivation of naming.

Internally motivated nicknames form under lingual factors (proper name of the name-bearer) and constitute 3,6% of the sample. They bare no significative meaning and are formed by means of shortening the first names (e.g., *Barky*, *Brak*), shortening or derivation of the family name (e.g., *Obammy*, *Bam-Bam*, *O-boy*), or abbreviating, contracting or clipping of both first name and family name (e.g., *B.O.*, *B-Ho*).

Externally motivated nicknames appear under the influence of extralinguistic factors and form the group of nominative units of onomastic and appellative origin, such as *Carter 2.0*, *Purple Lips*, *Dr. Utopia*. According to the sample, 27,7% of nicknames of Barack Obama belong to this group.

“Synthesis group”, which features both external and internal motivation, constitutes 68,6% of the. Like externally motivated nicknames, they refer to various characteristics of the denotatum, explicate features of its appearance, character, behavior, etc. (e.g., *Barack Obabykiller*, *Barack W. Bush*, *President Fail*).

Barack Obama has entered American history as the first and sole black president of the USA. Therefore, no wonder, his external characteristics served as motifs for emergence of numerous derogative and politically incorrect nicknames given on the part of the critics and political opponents of the statesman. In this way, American critic David Ehrenstein put the title “Obama the ‘Magic Negro’” for his editorial in *Los Angeles Times*, where he analyzed Barack Obama’s image in white American culture. Both image and the trope date back to the 1950s and traditionally refer to a black character whose purpose in the plot of a book or a film is to help the white protagonist get out of trouble, realize his own faults and overcome them. However, in everyday use, the nickname along with the one like *Purple Lips* or zoomorphic or ethnographic units like *Chimpy the Kenyan* or *The Kenyan Kid* rather refer to the racial belonging of Barack Obama than his success in ending racial bias or injustice in the USA. Linguistically, all these are cases of metonymic transference in cognitive plane.

Nicknames *Jug Ears* and *Dumbo* came into being due to the case of metaphorical transfer based on the analogy of ears’ size. Moreover, the nickname *Dumbo* features allusive nature as it refers to a character of Walt Disney’s cartoon — an elephant called Dumbo famous for his large ears. The adjective *dumb* is used in English in the meaning of “lacking intelligence (stupid) or showing a lack of intelligence” [20]. In this light, American conservative social activist Rush Limbaugh claimed he was meaning ears when he called Barack Obama Dumbo; he didn’t mean brains but he guessed it’s interchangeable. Thus, this case exposes a combination of extralinguistic (reference to ears based on allusion) and linguistic factors (reference to intelligence based on partial homonymy) in motivating the naming.

A separate group in the sample constitute nicknames featuring political course and behavior of Barack Obama on the political arena. In particular, the former US president is called *Alfred E. Obama*, which is of metaphoric nature either. Built on the basis of analogy with a goofy image of Alfred E. Neuman featuring the catchphrase “What — Me Worry?” on the cover of American humor magazine, the nickname highlights Barak Obama’s approach to national security and economy in quite a derogative way.

The mechanism of cognitive metaphor underlies the formation of such names as *Barack Hussein Kardashian*, *President Pop Star*, *President Hollywood* and *The Celebrity of The United States*. In socio-political context, such cases of naming serve as tool for accusing the president of populism and showing off instead of faithfully performing his duties.

Donald Trump — an American business billionaire and recently elected US President — calls Barack Obama *Psycho* as a reaction to his refusal to ban flights to and from West Africa affected by the Ebola virus. Alongside, on the Internet Barack Obama is frequently called *Barack Insane Obama*. Such naming combines features of both internally and externally motivated nicknames and is formed by means of paronomasia as it is consonant to the president’s full name — *Barack Hussein Obama*.

Teleprompter is jokingly called the closest friend of Barack Obama as long as the president has always relied on it while he appeared in public, delivered speeches, took part in other political events. This fact caused the appearance of such externally motivated nicknames as *Captain Teleprompter*, *Teleprompter Jesus*, and *Teleprompter of the U.S. (TOTUS)* formed on the basis of metonymic transfer. Moreover, there has long been an assumption that the president is supposedly very concerned about the effect his words produce on public. Thus, the product of antonomasia — nickname *His Phoniness* — is a bright example of motivation based on (supposedly) personal attitudes and dispositions of the name-bearer.

American politician Dil Hudson in his addressing the president has coined the nickname *Barack Obabykiller*. A reason for that was the fact that Obama had earlier voted in the Illinois Senate against the bill designed to prevent partial-birth abortions. Furthermore, Barack Obama not once was called *First Gay President*, *Gaybama*, or *Bathhouse Barry* which we regard as tool for criticizing Obama's support of homosexual marriages. Thus, the given nicknames refer to "synthesis group" and are the products of metaphor (comparison of Barack Obama with a killer) and metonymy (attributing non-traditional sexual orientation to Barack Obama).

Barack Obama's presidency was marked by such evaluations as *Dr. Nothing* (as a product of antonomasia and metonymy), *Dr. Utopia* (combination of antonomasia, metaphor and allusion), *The Empty Chair* (metaphor), *The Empty-Suit-in-Chief* (metaphor), *King Zero* (metonymy), *President Fail* (metaphor), and many others. They all refer to the presidential practices as not beneficial to the US society, passive, and even disastrous in many aspects.

Other personalities and their public image quite often become targets of comparison in the case of Barack Obama. The leading motif of such metaphoric nominations as *Barack W. Bush*, *Obama bin Laden*, *Barack Ilyich Lenin*, *Alinskyite-in-Chief*, *Carter 2.0*, *Obamachev*, etc. is similarity (or rather inheriting) of political management styles.

A unique group in the sample make up externally motivated nicknames of Barack Obama formed by means of allusion (as they refer to some historical, mythological, literary, or political fact). For example, the nickname *Chewbacca's Husband* was triggered by the imagination of Internet users who produced a series of images featuring the first lady Michelle Obama as compared to Chewbacca — the legendary character of "Star Wars" film series.

In his turn, the former US president is often called *Bambi* which is a case of audio-visual pun in Internet discourse. On the one hand, the sound form recalls the family name Obama, and on the other hand, the naming became famous through the Photoshop image of the famous cartoon character with his muzzle replaced by Barack Obama's face. The authorship of the nickname is attributed to American journalist and writer Christopher Hitchens who compared Barack Obama's behaving at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony with that of Bambi, apparently because Barack Obama bore himself very shyly.

Conclusions. In the study of Barack Obama's nicknames we ascertain the main morphological methods of their formation with composition being the most productive way. It can be explained by the bent for creativity on the part of the name-givers and the desire to highlight the name motivation and preserve the general recognizability of naming (i.e. its association with the particular denotatum).

Depending on the source of motivation the nicknames fall into groups of internally motivated, externally motivated, and complex motivated ("synthesis group"). The study also established the main cognitive and semantic principles of assigning nicknames to Barack Obama within the defined groups. In most cases, nicknames refer to appearance and personal attitudes of the president, reflect the cornerstones of his policymaking and political behavior, or expose parallels with other real and fictional personalities and characters.

Nicknames explicate both culture of the society and culture of a particular individual. The higher they are both, the less negative connotations contains the area of unofficial naming. The prospects for further investigation into the topic are seen in analyzing

verbocreative profiles of the renowned name-givers like Donald Trump in the aspect of their discursive realizations.

ЛІНГВОКОГНІТИВНА ПАРАМЕТРИЗАЦІЯ ПРІЗВИСЬК БАРАКА ОБАМИ

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У фокусі дослідження постають прізвиська колишнього президента США Барака Обами як маркери суб'єктивної евалюації особистісного та політичного профілю державного діяча з боку різних учасників політичного дискурсу. У статті розглядаються морфологічні засоби творення прізвиськ Барака Обами, їх мотиваційна база та прототипізація.

Ключові слова: Барак Обама, антропонім, прізвисько, словотвір, семантика, мотивація.

ЛІНГВОКОГНІТИВНАЯ ПАРАМЕТРИЗАЦИЯ ПРОЗВИЩ БАРАКА ОБАМЫ

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В фокусе исследования находятся прозвища бывшего президента США Барака Обамы как маркеры субъективной эвалюации личностного и политического профиля государственного деятеля со стороны различных участников политического дискурса. В статье рассматриваются морфологические средства образования прозвищ Барака Обамы, их мотивационная база и прототипизация.

Ключевые слова: Барак Обама, антропоним, прозвище, словообразование, семантика, мотивация.

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