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Motivation for appellativized given names in Finnish and Hungarian slang compounds

1. Introduction

Finnish slang contains many compounds that include a homonym of a proper name as a head or a modifier. These include the noun *ovimikko* ‘doorman’ (lit. ‘door’ + male name *Mikko*) and the adjective *oskarinkokoinen* ‘small’ (lit. male name *Oskari* + ‘sized’). In these expressions, the words *mikko* and *oskari* cannot be understood as authentic proper names but instead have gone through a process of appellativization and are understood as appellatives.

These kinds of compounds are also found in the slang of another Finno-Ugric language, Hungarian. For instance, *tankaranka* means ‘big woman’ (lit. ‘tank’ + female name *Aranka*) and *zsuzsifogkefe* ‘toilet brush’ (lit. female diminutive *Zsuzsi* + ‘toothbrush’). In this article, I will give a detailed analysis of the motivation for the appellativization of given names in Finnish slang compounds and use Hungarian compounds as points of comparison. I examine why the names in the data have been appellativized. I have found several reasons for the appellativization of given names in compounds and have created several categories based on the motivation for this practice. I will show that the main motivations are phonological structure, metaphor, metonymy, and connotation, but the appellativized expressions can also be based on the name of a real or fictive person.

The outline of this article is as follows. First, there is a brief look at Finnish and Hungarian slang (section 2) and at the phenomenon of appellativization (section 3). The data are introduced in section 4. Section 5 presents an analysis of the motivations for appellativization in the data. Finally, in section 6, the results are summarised.

2. Finnish and Hungarian slang

The data for the research have been compiled from a Finnish slang dictionary (PAUNONEN 2000) and from several Hungarian slang dictionaries and theses, which are listed in the references. The Finnish source is a dictionary of Helsinki slang, but most of the compounds can also be understood by Finnish speakers from other parts of the country, as Helsinki slang has spread far beyond the capital. Below I present a short overview of Finnish and Hungarian slang.

The roots of Helsinki slang have their origins in the end of the 19th century, a time when Helsinki was growing and rapidly industrialising. By the middle of that century, Helsinki was almost a monolingual Swedish-speaking town, although until the beginning of the 20th century almost half of its inhabitants spoke Finnish as their mother tongue. Slang arose as a common language for Finnish- and Swedish-speaking workers in the bilingual areas where they lived. Helsinki slang did not change very much until the 1940s. Then it started to lose its importance connecting Finnish and Swedish speakers, because Helsinki increasingly became a Finnish-speaking town; meanwhile, slang became used more and more by young people. It is possible to differentiate two forms of Helsinki slang: the old Helsinki slang, which was spoken from the end of the 19th century until the 1950s, and the newer slang. Nevertheless, Helsinki slang can be seen as a continuum which has constantly been changing (PAUNONEN 2000: 15–16; see also PAUNONEN 1994, PAUNONEN et al. 2009).

In Hungary, according to KÖVECSÉS (2009: 15–16), a typical slang speaker is a young man. Educational background also seems to affect the speaking of slang. Less well-educated Hungarians use more slang than better-educated Hungarians. Criminals also use slang. For this reason, Hungarians sometimes call slang *tolvajnyelv*, the language of criminals. In Finland as well, criminals and drug users have their own slang, a kind of secret language. When they do not want other people to know what they are talking about, they use slang (NAHKOLA–SAANILAHTI 1999: 53).

In general, there are both differences and similarities between Finnish and Hungarian slang. There are also differences between the various kinds of slang in the data compiled for this article, as all the Finnish expressions come from Helsinki slang while the Hungarian expressions represent several types (e.g. prisoner slang, army slang, student slang). However, I do not compare slangs in general, but rather concentrate on a specific vocabulary group, namely the compounds that include an appellativized given name.

There are several ways in which new slang words are formed. They can be borrowed from other languages or formed by derivation. They can also be formed by a change of meaning, giving a standard word a new definition or connotation (NAHKOLA–SAANILAHTI 1999: 72, KIS 2008: 42–43). However, the most important factor in the present analysis is change of meaning. In the compounds found in the data, the meaning of a given name has changed, with a proper name becoming an appellative.¹

¹ The question of whether proper names have meaning is a topic of lively debate in the world of linguistic and onomastic theory. I do not take up this topic here. For the meaning of names, see e.g. NYSTRÖM 2016.

3. Appellativization of proper names

Nouns are either proper names or appellatives. It is obvious, for example, that *Einstein* and *van Gogh* are proper names. Nevertheless, proper names can be used as appellatives. VAN LANGENDONCK (2007: 174) shows examples of proper names used as appellatives, such as *Newton was the Einstein of the 17th century*, in which *Einstein* is not actually a proper name but refers metaphorically to a great physicist. Another example is *I would like to own a van Gogh*, in which *van Gogh* refers metonymically to van Gogh's paintings. In these expressions, the motivation for appellativization is clear – to create either a metaphor or a metonymy. However, in the present analysis, the motivation for appellativization seems to be quite a complex phenomenon. Moreover, there can be various reasons for appellativization other than metaphor and metonymy.

The first Finnish linguist to research the appellativization of given names was SIMO HÄMÄLÄINEN (1956). He divided appellativized expressions into three groups. The first group includes the simplex words, i.e. expressions in which the name itself is appellativized, such as *uuno*, originally the male name *Uuno*, and used to mean 'stupid, dumb'. In the second group are compounds that include an appellativized name, for example *ovimikko* (lit. 'door' + male name *Mikko*) 'doorkeeper'. The third group consists of sentences which include an appellativized name, such as *Johan se alkoi Lyyti kirjoittaa* 'a machine which has stopped working starts to work again', lit. 'Finally, Lyyti [a female name] started to write'. The focus in this article is on the second type of appellativization. In a discussion of the motivation for appellativization, compounds are fruitful and interesting objects to research. It is possible to identify several reasons which have motivated appellativization in compounds (see section 5), whereas the motivation for appellativized names can be vaguer. For instance, the earlier mentioned *uuno* was appellativized already in the 1910s (PAUNONEN 2000), but the motivation for its appellativization process remains unknown. Compounds including an appellativized proper name have been studied by SKÖLDBERG and TOPOROWSKA GRONOSTAJ (2006), who conducted lexicographic research on Swedish appellativized given names in compounds.

In Hungarian the appellativization of proper names has attracted a deal of interest (see e.g. PARAPATICS 2012, RESZEGI 2010, SEIFERT 2008, SZENDREY 1936, TAKÁCS 2007). Also, appellativized given names in Hungarian and Finnish as well as in Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian have been compared (TAKÁCS 2001, 2010). However, compounds have never been the focus of these comparisons. According to TAKÁCS (2007), a Hungarian name which appellativizes is usually a nickname, not an official, given name.

4. Data

As mentioned in section 2, the data for this research have been compiled from one Finnish slang dictionary (PAUNONEN 2000) and several Hungarian slang dictionaries and theses (see the references). From these resources, I have selected every compound that includes a homonym of a given name either as a head or a modifier and functions as an appellative.

The Finnish data consist of 145 compounds: 113 (78%) include a homonym of a given name as a head, 31 compounds (21%) include a homonym as a modifier and one compound has both, a head and a modifier. The Hungarian data consist of 88 compounds: 81 (92%) include a homonym of a given name as a head and 7 have compounds (8%) as a modifier.

5. Motivation for appellativization

In this section the main motivation groups are introduced or, in other words, the reasons why the given names have been appellativized in the compounds identified in the data. Not every compound will be discussed, but rather representative examples of each type will be given.

5.1. Real person

First of all, appellativization can be motivated by the proper name of a real or a fictitious person. Even a standard word can be based on a real person's name. For example, the Hungarian word *császár* and the Finnish word *keisari*, both meaning 'emperor', are formed from the name *Julius Caesar* (HAJDÚ 2003: 71; SSA s.v. *keisari*).

The data for this article contain few compounds motivated by the name of a real or a fictitious person. For example, the Finnish word *vanjaeno* 'Russian' (lit. male name *Vanja* + 'uncle') was motivated by Anton Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya*. Another Finnish example is *tomppamesta* 'gay place' (lit. male diminutive *Tomppa* + 'place'). *Tomppa* means 'homosexual' in Helsinki slang, and the motivation for the appellativized expression was Tom of Finland (PAUNONEN 2000) – the pseudonym of a Finnish artist who became well known for his highly homoerotic art.

An interesting Finnish compound is *alberthousut* 'trousers which have a patch on the knee' (lit. male name *Albert* + 'trousers'). The motivation for this expression is not known. However, it is known that the expression was used in the 1970s (PAUNONEN 2000). In that decade a rock band called the Hurriganes (sic!) was famous in Finland, and one of its members was Albert Järvinen. It is quite plausible that Mr Järvinen wore patched or torn trousers in concert, a dress style that could have motivated the compound *alberthousut*.



In Hungarian there are three compounds that have the female name *Lujza* as a head: *lólujza*, *tonnalujza* and *donnalujza* (lit. *ló* ‘horse’, *tonna* ‘ton’, *Donna*, a female name²). These expressions all mean ‘fat woman’. It is possible that the appellativization of *Lujza* was motivated by a famous radio show called *Lujza és Jenő* (*Lujza* and *Jenő*) broadcast on Hungarian radio in the 1970s. The characters *Lujza* and *Jenő* were a fictitious married couple, and *Lujza* was a slightly simple woman. Of course, it is not possible to know if *Lujza* was fat, as the show was only on the radio, but *Lujza*’s character might have motivated these pejorative compounds ending with her name, *lujza*.

5.2. Phonological structure

Phonological structure is the most common motivation for appellativization in both the Finnish data and the Hungarian. There can be alliteration, assonance, consonance or rhyme between the head and the modifier in a compound. For instance, the Finnish compounds *parkkipirkko* and *lappuliisa*, both meaning ‘traffic warden’ (lit. ‘parking’ + female name *Pirkko*; ‘slip’ + female name *Liisa*), have probably been motivated by their phonological structure. In both compounds there is alliteration between the head and the modifier, and in *parkkipirkko* there is also consonance between the head and the modifier. It would be almost impossible to change the heads in these two expressions (**parkkiliisa*, **lappupirkko*) because in this case the phonological similarities with the heads and the modifiers would no longer exist. Another Finnish example of alliteration and consonance in parts of a compound is *sentraalisántra* ‘switchboard operator’, ‘gossiper’ (lit. ‘central’ + female name *Santra*). It is impossible to find any other Finnish female name that starts with the consonant *s* and has the consonant cluster *ntr* in the middle.

Phonological structure is also an important motivation for appellativized compounds in the Hungarian data. For instance, in the expressions *kíváncsifáncsi* ‘observing teacher’³ (lit. ‘curious’ + female diminutive *Fáncsi*) and *tankaranka* ‘fat woman’ (lit. ‘tank’ + female name *Aranka*) there is assonance, consonance and rhyme between the heads and the modifiers. In this sense, the phonological structure similarly motivates the appellativization in both the Finnish and the Hungarian compounds.

Nevertheless, there are also differences between the Hungarian and the Finnish data. In the Finnish, for instance, the compounds ending with *kalle* (< male

² *Donna* as a female name is not a usual name in Hungarian. It is probably the modifier of *donnalujza* because of the phonological similarity to *tonna* ‘ton’.

³ In the material used for this study, *kíváncsifáncsi* refers to an observing teacher. However, in prison slang *fáncsi* means a ‘curious person’. The expressions are motivated by a funny animal cartoon character called *Kíváncsi Fáncsi* created by Zsolt Richly (SZABÓ 1999).



name *Kalle*) are often motivated by the phonological structure as can be seen in these examples: *kuumakalle* ‘a person who gets angry easily’ (lit. ‘hot’ + *Kalle*), and *keppikalle* and *nappikalle* ‘police officer’ (lit. *keppi* ‘stick’, *nappi* ‘button’). In these expressions there are phonological similarities – alliteration, assonance and consonance – between the modifiers and the head *kalle*. In the Hungarian data there are no such appellativized names as a head (or a modifier) that have formed more than one or two compounds motivated by the sound structure.

Another type of appellativization motivated by the sound structure consists of words similar to the sound structures of the words to which they refer; in Finnish slang examples are *mari* (< female name *Mari*), and in Hungarian slang, *mari*, *maresz*, and *mariska* (< female name *Mária*), all of which refer to ‘marijuana’ (PAUNONEN 2000 s.v. *mari*; TAKÁCS 2006: 134). I argue that it is no coincidence that these slang words are homonyms of given names. Rather it seems to be quite common that if a slang word is phonologically similar to the word it refers to, it is a homonym of a proper name; in other words, it takes the shape of a proper name.

These kinds of expressions are found in both sets of data. In the Finnish data, for example, we find the compound *marisätkä* (female name *Mari* + ‘joint’), meaning ‘marijuana joint’, where the modifier *mari* is shortened from the word *marijuana* to which it refers. In the Hungarian data, the compounds *gépistván*, *géppista* and *géppityu* all mean ‘machine pistol’ and are used in military slang. *Gép* is ‘machine’ in Hungarian, whereas *István* is a male name and *Pista* and *Pityu* are diminutives of *István*. ‘Machine pistol’ is *géppisztoly* in Hungarian, and it is quite likely that the similar sound structure of *pisztoly* and *Pista* motivated the expression *géppista*. In the other two expressions, *Pista* is replaced by other forms of the name *István*.

5.3. Metaphor

The desire to create a metaphor motivates some of the compounds in the data. For example, the Finnish compound *rosvoroope*, meaning ‘an ATM that does not give your card back’ (lit. ‘robber’ + male name *Roope*) is motivated by personification. An ATM which is conceptualised as acting like a human being is called by a compound word that includes an appellativized name. Probably because of the alliterative sound structure with the modifier *rosvo*, *roope* is the head of the compound.

Another Finnish example of metaphor as motivation is *yrjömoppi* ‘ugly hair’ (lit. male name *Yrjö* + ‘mop’). In colloquial parlance *yrjö* means ‘vomit’, ‘disgusting’ (PAUNONEN 2000). In this metaphor, the ugly hair and the mop with which the vomit can be cleaned up are conceptualised as being visually similar.



In the Hungarian data some expressions contain an animal name as a modifier, such as *oroszlánjolán* (lit. ‘lion’ + *Jolán*) and *lóhujza* (lit. ‘horse’ + *Lujza*), both of which mean ‘a big woman’. *Oroszlán* ‘lion’ and *ló* ‘horse’ are metaphors: in other words, a big woman is conceptualised as being as big as a lion or a horse. These examples are highly affective, even pejorative, which, according to KOSKI (1992: 21), is typical of this kind of metaphor, that is, animal names used metaphorically for human beings. According to the data for this research, compounds including both an animal metaphor and an appellativized given name are found only in Hungarian slang, but not in Finnish slang. Although there are numerous animal metaphors in the Finnish language (see KOSKI 1992), these metaphors apparently do not form compounds with appellativized names as in Hungarian.

5.4. Metonymy

In colloquial language names are often used metonymically as ethnic epithets, for example *Fritz* means ‘German’, *Ivan* ‘Russian’, and *Olaf* ‘Swedish’ (see HAJDÚ 2003: 74, HÄMÄLÄINEN 1956: 216, ALLEN 1983). There are metonymical expressions of this kind in the Finnish data as well. For example, *lassonikolai* (lit. ‘rope’ + male name *Nikolai*) refers to a ‘Russian ranger’. In this compound a typical Russian male name, *Nikolai*, is used metonymically to refer to any Russian man, whereas the modifier specifies the task of the soldier. Interestingly, in the Hungarian data there are no such compounds in which a given name is used as an ethnic epithet.

Nevertheless, compounds motivated by metonymy are found in the Hungarian data. The Hungarian compounds *gyohaberci* (lit. ‘bald’ + male name *Berci*) and *kopteriván* (lit. ‘bald’ + male name *Iván*),⁴ as well as the Finnish compound *nahkajussi* (lit. ‘skin’ + male name *Jussi*), all meaning ‘army recruit’, are motivated by metonymy. A word referring to a part of the body is used to mean the whole person. Metonymy has also motivated the Hungarian compound *cicijuci* ‘big breasted woman’ (lit. ‘tit’ + female diminutive *Juci*) together with the sound structure. There is rhyme between the compound’s head and the modifier, which explains the head *juci*. The modifier *cici* means a literal part of the body, the breast, but in this compound, it refers metonymically to the whole person.

5.5. Connotation

In onomastics, connotation means the content of information, images or associations pertaining to a name. The associations can be common to speakers

⁴ *Gyoha* and *kopter* are soldier slang words in Hungarian meaning ‘army recruit’, ‘bald’ (< *kopasz* ‘bald’) (KIS 2008 s.v. *gyoha*, *kopter*).



of a given language or they can be subjective, a person's own image (AINIALA et al. 2016: 32). According to AINIALA et al., the appellative use of names is based precisely on these connotations. In my opinion the appellativization of proper names, in other words, the appellative use of them, is not always based on the connotations. The motivation for appellativization is a much more complex phenomenon for which there can be several reasons, as can be seen in sections 5.1.–5.4. However, connotation is indeed an important motivation for appellativization, only it is not at all easy to say when it motivates appellativization because connotations are so subjective.

Every Hungarian compound including *Lujza* as a head in the data means 'fat'. As mentioned in section 5.1., the motivation for the appellativization of *Lujza* could be the character in a well-known radio programme called *Lujza*, which has partly motivated the connotative expressions ending with *lujza*.

In the Finnish data, the expressions *talikkotaavetti* (lit. 'digging fork' + male name *Taavetti*) and *junttieinari* (lit. 'redneck' + *Einari*) both mean 'a person living in the countryside'. In *talikkotaavetti* the head and the modifier form an alliteration, but this expression as well as *junttieinari* could also have been motivated by connotation. Perhaps *Taavetti* and *Einari* are names that connote people living in the countryside. It is difficult to say if the motivation for these expressions is in fact connotation; further research would be required to find out conclusively.

6. Summary

In this paper, some light has been shed on the motivating factors for the appellativization of given names in slang compound words in Finnish and Hungarian. Many similarities have been found between the Finnish and Hungarian expressions, but also some differences.

The analysis illustrates that the motivation for appellativization in slang compounds can be a name of a person, either real or fictive; a phonological structure; a metaphor; a metonymy or a connotation. There are Finnish and Hungarian examples in all of these groups. Phonological structure is a very common motivation for appellativizing given names in both Finnish and Hungarian compounds. Of the various motivations, connotation is the most complex, one reason being that determining motivation by connotation is highly subjective.

In this article the motivation for appellativizing compound words has been discussed. It would be interesting to see if the motivation for appellativization is similar in other cases, such as in appellativized simplex words or in sentences including an appellativized name. Probably in the case of simplex words,



the phonological structure would not be as important as it is in the case of compounds, as usually the phonological similarities lie between the head and the modifier. However, sound structure can also motivate the appellativization of given names to form simplex words, as seen in section 5.2.

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Abstract

Finnish slang contains many compounds that include a homonym of a proper name as a head or a modifier. These include the noun *ovimikko* ‘doorman’ (lit. ‘door’ + male name *Mikko*). In this expression, the word *mikko* cannot be understood as authentic proper name but instead has gone through a process of appellativization and is understood as appellative.

These kinds of compounds are also found in the slang of another Finno-Ugric language, Hungarian. For instance, *tankaranka* means ‘big woman’ (lit. ‘tank’ + female name *Aranka*). In this article, I will give a detailed analysis of the motivation for the appellativization of given names in Finnish slang compounds and use Hungarian compounds as points of comparison.

The analysis illustrates that the motivation for appellativization in slang compounds can be a name of a person, either real or fictive; a phonological structure; a metaphor; a metonymy or a connotation. There are Finnish and Hungarian examples in all of these groups. Phonological structure is a very common motivation for appellativizing given names in both Finnish and Hungarian compounds. Of the various motivations, connotation is the most complex, one reason being that determining motivation by connotation is highly subjective.

Keywords: appellativization, Finnish language, Hungarian language.