Language Image of the Human in Partners´ (lovers´) Names Inspired by Animals

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Abstract The paper deals with the Czech lovers´ names whose source domain is the animal world. Based on the theory of conceptual metaphor formulated by Lakoff and Johnson and the language image of the world, linguistics approach formulated during 1980s in Poland by so called Lublin scholars (Bartmiński, Wierzbicka and other), we present and interpretation of these names. By showing what meanings and connotations are contained in lovers´ names inspired by animal world, we try to understand the deeper meaning of the using these names between partners. The language material has been drawn both from a questionnaires and online forums.

Keywords Lovers´ Names, Partners´ Names, Cognitive Linguistics, Cognitive Metaphor, Animals in the Phraseology, Language Image of the World, Anthropological Linguistics

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present some of the conclusions of our dissertation (in progress), which deals with partners´ (or lovers´) names, sometimes also called gentle names [1], sweet names or lovely nicknames (especially in online discussions[1]). These are the names used by people who are dating, or who have been married, to address each other instead of their first names, surnames or hypocorisms. With respect to the fact that these names represent very rich language material, we will only focus on one part in this paper, namely on the names inspired by the animal kingdom. For each name, we specify in brackets whether it is used for the female partner (F), male partner (M) or both partners (F/M). In the case of proposed Czech idioms we use the square brackets to explain the literal meaning. The reason is that we don´t know the corresponding English translation and, we consider as pivotal for the reader to figure oneself the meaning of Czech idioms.

2. Conceptual Background

The interpretation was based on two essential propositions of cognitive linguistics. The first is the theory of conceptual metaphor formulated by Lakoff and Johnson. According to these authors, the metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of our whole perception. As shown in their pivotal works, the human conceptual system is inherently metaphorical [2, 3]. The second starting point for us was the language image of the world formulated in the 1980s by Lublin scholars. This approach places emphasis not only on the close connection between language and mind, but also on the interconnection of language and culture and, together with the conceptual metaphor theory, it emphasizes the anthropocentric nature of language. Above all, it is our human experience, our physicality, that affects language.

This concept of language also brings a different understanding of meaning. Anna Wierzbicka even states that the meaning is "what people mean" or "what they have in mind when they use the word" [4]. Therefore, the connotative component is a fundamental element of the meaning in cognitive linguistics. Such a conception of language also allows us to examine and interpret words and names (partners´ names, in our case) whose motivation cannot be determined with certainty.

3. Data Collection

Partners´ names have not been subject to much detailed research in Czech linguistics. These names are classified as linguistic taboos, and research thus may be very difficult[2]. Therefore, our primary aim was to acquire very basic language material which could be then subjected to a lexicological analysis.

For data collection, we used a questionnaire method or, more precisely, a public inquiry method. In an anonymous online questionnaire placed on the web page www.vyplnto.cz from 2013, December 3rd to 2014, January 31st the respondents were asked to specify which names they

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[1] *Roztomilé přezdívky pro kluky*. Dostupné z WWW: http://www.diskuse.libimseti.cz/roztomile-prezdivky-pro-kluky297182 [online] [cit-2013-02-07]

[2] Hrdlička, M., K otázce tzv. něžných pojmenování mezi partnery, Češtinář, 1995/96, pp. 9-14.

use for addressing the partner instead of using first name and its variations and to provide explanation of the names used. The questionnaire was filled by 347 people, 247 women and 100 men; 71 % between age 18 to 26. But any demographic characteristics were under investigation. Similarly, there was no focus on any speech community. The questionnaire was open to anybody.

Regarding the main aim to collect only basic language material, this was supplemented with excerpts from fourteen online discussion forums that deal with the issue of addressing partners[3]. In total, we acquired over a thousand partners´ names.

4. Humans versus Animals

Animals and animal world are of paramount importance, not only in our lives, but also in the language. On one hand they are most similar to us, so we have a strong need to be clearly separated from them, but, on the other hand, they represent a huge inspiration for us, and we cannot do without them. Pajdzińská [5] showed that the language image of animals is based on the anthropocentric nature of language or, more precisely, on the opposition between our own (human) versus different (non-human; in this case, belonging to the animal world)[4]. In Czech phraseology, the lexeme *zvíře* (animal) is associated with rather negative characteristics

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[3] *Jak oslovovat své drahé protějšky*. Dostupné z WWW: http://timy.blog.cz/0611/jak-oslovovat-sve-drahe-protejsky [online] [cit-2013-02-07]
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Müllerová, L. *Jak si doma říkáme? Lásečko i prasátko*. Dostupné z WWW: http://www.prozeny.cz/magazin/sex-a-vztahy/laska-a-vztahy/27353-jak-si-doma-rikame-lasecko-i-prasatko [online] [cit-2013-02-07]
A jak si doma říkáte vy? Milujete zdrobněliny, nebo z nich máte osypky? Dostupné z WWW: http://www.prozeny.cz/magazin/sex-a-vztahy/laska-a-vztahy/27353-jak-si-doma-rikame-lasecko-i-prasatko?komentare=nejnovejsi [online] [cit-2013-02-07]
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Jak oslovujete svoji milou? Dostupné z WWW: http://forum.qark.net/o-zenskych/jak-oslovujete-svoji-milou/5/?wap2 [online] [cit-2013-02-07]
[4] See also Mosiolek – Klosińská, K., Antropocentryzm leksyki „zwierzecej". In: Grzegorczykowa, R – Zaron, Z (eds.): Semantyczna struktura słownictwa i wypowiedzi, 1997, s. 71–78.

(for example we use phrases such as *jíst jako zvíře* [to eat like an animal], *chovat se jako zvíře* [to act like an animal], *milovat se jako zvířata* [to make love like animals]). In contrast, the designation of a person as a *velké zvíře* [big animal] refers to his/her influential position. We believe that this ambivalence with a predominance of the negative pole is typical of the Czech language, although unfortunately research in this area is not sufficient. All these set phrases correspond with conceptual metaphors ANIMALS AS PEOPLE or, PEOPLE AS ANIMALS, where the human aspects are projected onto animals and conversely [6, 7]. The detailed analysis of relationship between these two conceptual metaphors and partners´ names have not been examined yet, however, it is one of the our future aims.

The animal kingdom is the richest source area of partners´ names; in fact, partners´ names inspired by animals represent nearly a quarter of all names. Three of them: *Broučku* [Little beetle] (M/F), *Kočičko* [Little cat] (F) a *Beruško* [Ladybird] (F) in our survey are among the ten most popular names in general.

The motivation of these names can be divided into five groups: the popularity of the animal (you address your partner *Kundlanko* [Mantis], because you like mantises), the appearance of the animal (you address your partner *Lištičko* [Little fox], because she has red hair), the characteristics of the animal (you address your partner *Méďo* [Little bear], because he not only likes but he sleeps a lot), a special situation (you address your partner *Veverko* [Mink], because you like the phrase *šukat jako veverky* [fuck like minks] from the film *Basic Instinct*), and the last (and the largest) group – names in which the respondents did not specify their motivation. It is this last group that we will discuss in more detail. For the following analysis, we have selected only the names which were repeated frequently and we devided them into four conceptual domains: A PARTNER IS A BEAST, A PARTNER IS A WILD ANIMAL, A PARTNER IS A DOMESTIC ANIMAL and A PARTNER IS AN INSECT.

5. Partner is a Mammal (Rodent)

Partner names based on the order of rodents include names derived from the word *myš* [mouse]: *Myško* (F), *Myšo* (F), *Myšičko* (F), *Myšury* (F), *Myšáku* (M), *Myšánku* (M), *Myšáčku* (M), and the word *krysa* [rat]: *Krysičko* (F). Both of these animals are abundant in the Czech Republic, and they both destructive and unwanted pests in households or homes. They are small and fast animals, and we usually want to get rid of them by catching them or luring them into a trap. In phraseology, the mouse is associated with poverty (*chudý jako myš* [as poor as a mouse]), shyness (*plachý jako myš* [as shy as a mouse]), dullness (*koukat jako vyoraná myš* [look like a ploughed mouse]), indistinctiveness (*šedá myš* [grey mouse]), agility (*rychlý/hbitý jako myš* [as fast/agile as a mouse]). Rat is associated with knavishness (*chovat se jako krysa* [to act like rat]) and cowardice (*zbabělý jako krysa* [as cowardly as a rat].

The mouse is also a symbol of certain cunningness and ingenuity that comes from the constant threat of being caught, as can be seen, for example, in the popular cartoon series *Tom and Jerry*. The mouse has also become a model for another popular series – *Mickey Mouse*. The name *Myško* [Little mouse] is also an expressive name for a woman in the Czech language. We believe that it is the agility, speed and cunningness that are the main motivating factors for these partner names. Similarly, the woman/man are "being hunted" in a relationship, they have to flee and dodge, and they are either eventually caught or not.

6. Partner is a Mammal (Beast)

The largest group of partner names contains those that identify the partner as a beast, either a wild beast or a domestic beast.[5] Partners´ names derived from wild beasts primarily include the bear, tiger and lion; partner names derived from domestic beasts then mainly include the cat and dog. Since both groups display significant differences, we will discuss them individually.

Partner is a Wild Beast

Wild beasts generally symbolize power (domination), strength, danger, fighting spirit, uncontrollability, wildness, fear, respect, as well as a dangerous attraction. The word *medvěd* [bear] is clearly the most popular beast in partners´ names: *Medvídku* (M), *Medvěde* (M), *Méďo* (M), *Meďko* (M), *Míšo* (M), *Medvědice* (F), and except the last one all of these partner names are used for men.

The bear is an animal that does not live in the Czech Republic any more but, unlike tigers and lions, bears used to inhabit Czech forests and they were probably the most dangerous beasts. The image of the bear in Czech phraseology was dealt with in more detail by Mrhačová-Jandová [8], who determined strength, danger, hunger, greed, laziness and awkwardness as the key characteristics. Nowadays, we know bears primarily from television and books – see, for example, the world famous *Winnie the Pooh* and *Yogi Bear*. Bears are also very popular plush toys; especially women like them.

Given that these names are primarily used for men, we believe that their choice is motivated by their characteristic features such as power and potential danger. According to the Czech language image of male, males are seen as strong and dangerous, and women as rather weak [9]. However, our subconscious also contains an idea of the bear as a toy, so the designation of a partner as the bear also bears the connotation of something we can play with or something we like to play with.

Similar features as in the bear can also be found in the names inspired by the *tygr* [tiger]: *Tygře* (M), *Tygřice* (F), *Tygříku* (M) and *lev* [lion]: *Lvíčku* (M/F), *Lvíčenko* (F), animals that are exotic for Czech people. Set phrases primarily imply power, wildness and rage [8], which can also

be linked to sexual activities (*v posteli byl jako tygr* [he was like a tiger in bed]). Addressing a partner with the name *Tygře / Tygřice* [Tiger / Tigress] also carries significant connotations of a sexual nature.

Partner is a Domestic Beast

Domestic beasts that inspire partners´ names include the dog [pes] and the cat [kočka]. These two animals represent the most popular and commonly used Czech domestic pets. Names associated with the cat are usually used for women: *Kočko* (F), *Kočičko* (F), *Kočinko* (F), *Koči* (F), *Koťátko* (F), *Čičinko* (F), *Čičátko* (F), only rarely for men: *Kocoure* (M), *Kocourku* (M); the opposite is true for names associated with the dog: *Pejsku* (M), *Pejsečku* (M), *Pejsánku* (M/F), *Čaučáne* (M).

The cat is characterized by friendliness, it loves cuddling and stroking, requires attention, can be moody and is easily offended (*nevděčný jako kočka* [as ungrateful as a cat]), it can "show claws" when necessary (*škrábe jako kočka* [to scratch like a cat]), and it is fussy about its food (*mlsný jako kočka* [as fussy as a cat]). Finally, there is legendary "hatred" between cats and dogs (*hádali se / štěkali na sebe / mají se rádi jako pes a kočka* [they argued / barked at each other / like each other like a dog and a cat]). The name *Kočko* (Cat) is also an expressively designation of a pretty (usually also young) woman.

The image of the dog in phraseology is very negative (*má se pod psa*, *psí počasí* [to feel under the dog, dog weather]), it is an animal that is beaten (*spráskaný jako pes* [as whipped as a dog]) and that is not treated very well (*má se hůř než pes* [to feel worse than a dog]). Beyond the dog is characterized also by fidelity (*věrný jako pes* [as faithful as a dog]) and obedience (*poslouchá jako pes* [to obey like a dog]), protects its owner, and is playful, even playfully mischievous and artless.

Partners´ names inspired by these beasts are based on the fact that we know these animals very well. We believe that rather than a language image stored in phraseology (naive view of the world) these names reflect the real characteristics and behaviour of these animals, because we can find parallels with the behaviour and characteristics of people in them. The (Euro-American) woman is much more similar to the cat, while the (Euro-American) man is more like a dog.

7. Partner is an Insect

The last large group of partners´ names inspired by the animal kingdom contain names associated with insects. Insects are all around us, they are very small creatures, they are unpleasant and annoying, we often use different repellents to protect ourselves from them. We must be very careful not to accidentally kill them.and some insects are very beautiful.

The largest group contains names derived from the word *brouk* [beetle]: *Broučku* (M/F), *Brouku* (M/F), *Broučí* (M), *Broučínku* (M), *Broučíne* (M), *Bloučínku* (M). This is probably because the designation of a person as a

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[5] Names assosiated with beasts represent over 30% of all names inspired by animals.

brouk/brouček (beetle/little beetle) is a popular expressive synonym for a partner. History of this appellation hasn´t been investigated yet. We can only assume that the popularity of these appellations is connected with small form of the animal. That means we have to deal with them carefully because it is easy to accidentally hurt them.

Expressive designations for women include also word *beruška* (ladybird), from which probably other partners´ names are derived: *Beruško* (F)*, Beru* (F), *Bery* (F), *Berušenko* (F), *Berunko* (F), *Bijuško* (F). The ladybird is a very beautiful and distinctive creature; other similar creatures include *včela* (bee), *čmelák* (bumblebee) and *motýl* (butterfly) and names associated with them: *Včeličko* (F), *Čmeláčku* (M), *Motýlku* (M/F). In contrast, creatures such as fireflies or crickets are not so beautiful. However, we have documented several examples of the names *Světluško* (F) and *Cvrčku* (M/F) [Firefly, Cricket]. These names may be connected by their sound form. Compared to other names, sibilants and affricatives are repeated in them, causing soft, pleasant and nice-sounding pronunciation, which is one of the characteristic features of partners´ names in general [10].

In our view, the main motivating factors of partners´ names connected with insects are their size or, more precisely, their small form, because small things must be looked after and taken care of (just as in the case of our partner), and their appearance (beauty), or the accentuation of the sound component.

8. Conclusions

The paper discusses a part of the Czech language image of human beings as partners, as represented in partners´ names inspired by the animal kingdom. We have shown that although animals are displayed in the language rather negatively, partners´ names display effort to point out positive qualities that can be applied to humans, to our partners. The most frequent source domain contains animals that we know well, that share our homes with us (cat, dog, bear in the form of plush toys) or that live around our homes (mouse, beetle, ladybird). We transfer especially the attractive appearance of these creatures (beautiful insects, cat) or characteristics similar to our partners, or human behaviour. With respect to wild animals (bear, tiger, lion), we are impressed by their strength (as strong as a bear, to have power as a lion), wildness or uncontrollability, which we associate more with sexual elements (to be like a tiger in a bed). The prevailing conceptualization of the woman as a mouse/cat and the man as a dog/bear or tiger can reflect the nature of the partner relationship in which the man is the one that "hunts", while the woman is the prey, who has to avoid the hunter or the predator to all costs.

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