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Anthroponymic Identity of the Characters in Tennessee Williams's Play "A Streetcar Named Desire"

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Abstract. The article discusses a literary character as a model of a linguistic personality in terms of his/her anthroponymic identity. The research has revealed that the anthroponymic identity of the literary character specified by the author is the whole system of his/her nominations being the source of information about a certain pragmatic situation in the character's life, perception of his/her name(s) by the other characters and their attitude to him/her. The anthroponymic identity is not stable and changes as the plot of the literary work goes, showing the character in the process of evolution and reflecting his/her inner transformations. It is one of the means of realization of the author's message and it also helps reveal the main theme of the literary work.

Keywords: literary work, identification, socialization, nomination, ethnonym, title, surname, forename

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Антропонимическая идентичность персонажей в пьесе Теннесси Уильямса «Трамвай "Желание"»

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Аннотация. Проведенное исследование позволило установить, что антропонимическая идентичность персонажа определяется писателем и включает в себя совокупность его номинаций, содержащих сведения о прагматической ситуации, в которой оказывается персонаж, о том, как другие герои воспринимают его имя и относятся к нему. Антропонимическая идентичность подвижна и трансформируется на разных уровнях повествования, демонстрируя персонажа в динамике становления и развития, отражая изменения его личности и характера. Она является важным средством воплощения авторского замысла, способствует раскрытию и пониманию главной темы произведения.

Ключевые слова: литературное произведение, идентификация, социализация, номинация, этноним, титул, фамилия, личное имя

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Introduction

Literary characters' names and their application are studied as a branch of onomastics called literary anthroponymics. Numerous research works on literary anthroponyms underscore their emotional and stylistic potential, significance in realization of an author's message and expression of a character's distinctive traits. The "decipherment" of associations and information contained in literary characters' names is very important for identifying and understanding the main ideas of a literary work, its symbolism and various implications.

Within the scope of this research, primary importance is assigned to the study of all the variants (forms) of literary characters' names in different instances of communication in view of the following facts:

– commentary and perception of a particular character's name by the other characters, its influence on them and effect on the reader, taking into consideration psychological, ethnic, cognitive, geographical and historical aspects of the name use at most;

– enrichment of the name with new content as the plot goes on;

– thoughts or images suggested by the name;

– the characters' association with their names in the light of the past, present and future;

– manifestation of the characters' life stories in their names;

– the senses carried out in the character's name, specifying the type of the character's speech behaviour and conditioning his/her social roles expressed in words.

All these pragmatic parameters are the anthroponymic identity of the literary character and they determine the name as a packed linguocultural text. Thus, the main goal of the study is to analyse the anthroponymic identity of the literary character.

Objects and Methods

The object of this study is the characters' names in the play "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1947) by the US writer Tennessee Williams (1911–1983). The play brought the author worldwide fame and, in many critics' opinion, is considered to be one of his best literary works. The research methods employed embrace the descriptive, comparative, etymological, structural, linguopragmatic, linguocultural, ethnolinguistic, psycholinguistic and stylistic types.

Results and Discussion

The central character is Blanche DuBois who visits her sister Stella and Stella's husband Stanley Kowalski. The action of the play unfolds in their house in the suburbs of New Orleans where a streetcar having a symbolic name Desire brings Blanche DuBois to. The central conflict of the drama is between the Southern aristocratic Blanche DuBois and her antipode – rude, aggressive and self-confident Stanley Kowalski.

When meeting Mitch, Stanley's friend, she explains the meaning of her French name Blanche DuBois – "white woods":

"Blanche: It's a French name. It means *woods* and Blanche means *white*, so the two together mean *white woods*. Like an orchard in spring! You can remember it by that" [Williams, 1974, p. 54].

The main attribute associated with her forename Blanche (derived from the French *blanche* meaning "white", feminine of *blanc*) is the white colour: the forename alludes to its symbolic meaning of lost innocence, moral purity, hopes and sentimental memory of the past behind which Blanche DuBois tries to conceal herself and her past, i.e. her unhappy, miserable and broken life. The adjective "white" and other words having this seme become the key words in the contexts describing her.

The author describes Blanche's appearance in the Kowalskis' house in the following way: "She is daintily dressed in a *white* suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of *pearl*, *white* gloves and hat …There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her *white* clothes, that suggests a moth" [Williams, 1974, p. 15].

Rummaging through Blanche's wardrobe trunk, Stanley says to his wife: "Where are your *white* fox-pieces? … *Pearls*! Ropes of them! What is this sister of yours, a deep-sea diver?" [Williams, 1974, p. 35].

"Stanley: But Sister Blanche is no *lily*! Ha-ha! Some *lily* she is!" [Williams, 1974, p. 98].

Stanley's mockingly scornful attitude to Blanche and his undisguised aversion to her are expressed by the corresponding name/appellative forms he uses to address her:

a) Sister Blanche:

"Stanley: Sister Blanche cannot be annoyed with business details right now!" [Williams, 1974, p. 34]

b) Her Majesty:

"Stanley: And serve 'em to Her Majesty in the tub?" [Williams, 1974, p. 97]

c) the Queen of the Nile (meaning the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra):

"Stanley: … you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on the throne and swilling down my liquor!" [Williams, 1974, p. 127]

d) that girl:

Stanley: That girl calls *me* common!" [Williams, 1974, p. 98]

Stanley finds out from the supply-man at the plant that Blanche's past is not irreproachable: she had promiscuous relationships with men at the Flamingo hotel in the town of Laurel and went by the name Dame Blanche:

"Stanley: … But even the management of the Flamingo was impressed by Dame Blanche! In fact they were so impressed by Dame Blanche that they requested her to turn in her room-key – for permanently!" [Williams, 1974, p. 99].

In this context, the title Dame which is the title of a woman awarded an order of knighthood acquires a negative connotation and is used as a slang meaning "a broad". Thus, the title Dame followed by the name indicates the social rank of its bearer and determines the character's behaviour.

Mitch takes a fancy to the Kowalskis' refined relative and at the beginning he addresses her formally using her title and surname – Miss DuBois indicating the distancing in the characters' relationships.

The closeness in the characters' relationships is manifested when Mitch begins to address Blanche DuBois using her forename.

Thus, Blanche DuBois' anthroponymic identity is represented by the author in the following way: Blanche, Miss DuBois, Her Majesty, Dame Blanche, Sister Blanche, the Queen of the Nile, that girl.

Stanley Kowalski, a former master sergeant in the engineers' corps, working as a factory auto-parts salesman now, is the complete opposite of Blanche. The main law for Stanley Kowalski's life is based on strength, brutality and violence towards everybody or everything he does not accept.

The character's surname Kowalski (derived from the Polish kowal, meaning "blacksmith"; one of the most common surnames) clearly suggests his belonging to Polish ethnic culture and nationality.

Blanche contemptuously calls Stanley by the offensive ethnonymic form Polack which is considered to be an insulting word for a person from Poland, especially for someone in the US whose family originally came from Poland:

"Blanche: … You healthy Polack, without a nerve in your body, of course you don't know what anxiety feels like!

Stanley: I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks" [Williams, 1974, p. 109].

Using the insulting form Polack, Blanche expresses not only her negative attitude to Stanley but she also clearly underscores her superiority over him by her French descent. In this case the functions of the name as a means of identification and socialization are distinctly implemented in the characters' nominations. Interestingly enough, Blanche herself draws her attention to the origin

of her beautiful name, explains its meaning and speaks proudly about her French ancestry; it is a sign of closeness/distancing in the relationships of the participants in communication. Stanley Kowalski tries to change the perception of self by the other characters, expressing indignation at addressing him by the ethnonym Polack. Therefore, French ancestry is a matter of pride and Polish ancestry is a matter of caution, negative attitude, and all these are manifested by the name. Thus, there is a certain ethnic and name gradation. It demonstrates that the characters as the bearers of such names are at different stages of socialization, and the character is reminded that his name does not fit in a general American cultural paradigm. These contexts show that the name plays an important part in the process of the characters' socialization.

The forename Stanley is derived from the surname which is of toponymous origin: Stanley < Old English *stān* stone + *lēah* wood or clearing. In the 19th century it became widespread in the USA and was a common name. The name appeared in about 1850, and it is still common and viable. In this case the ordinary Polish surname Kowalski is supported by the common American forename Stanley. These names match the character's image created by the playwright.

Stanley destructs Blanche completely: he breaks her marriage to Mitch, rapes her, and with his active assistance, she was taken to a mental hospital. Blanche's destruction reflects a symbolic hidden sense contained in the name Stanley: stone, meaning "gravestone or tombstone" + field. Thus, Stanley symbolizes "a grave", "a burial ground" for Blanche.

The name Stanley may be linked phonetically to the name Stanisław which, in its turn, refers to the Polish king who was the bearer of this name – Stanisław I Leszczyński (1677–1766). Referring to Huey Long (1893–1935), the American politician connected with fascism, Stanley Kowalski believes himself to be "a King":

"Stanley: … Remember what Huey Long said – "Every Man is a King!" And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!" [Williams, 1974, p. 107].

Therefore, the name Stanley may also be regarded as an Americanized form of the Polish name Stanisław.

In communication Blanche and Stanley's wife Stella address him, using mainly the neutral form Stanley:

"Blanche: Hello, Stanley! Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being!" [Williams, 1974, p. 37]

Stella also uses a hypocoristic form Stan as a sign of closeness in relationships with her husband:

"Stella: Oh, Stan! … I'm taking Blanche to Galatoire's for supper and then to a show, because it's your poker night" [Williams, 1974, p. 32].

The same form is used by Mitch as a sign of friendly relationships:

Mitch: You just blew your top, Stan" [Williams, 1974, p. 58].

Stella and Blanche express the distancing in relationships with Stanley in different ways. Stella expresses it by using the full anthroponymic formula Stanley Kowalski and Blanche does it using a combination of the title and the surname and also the offensive ethnonym Polack (see the examples above):

"Stella: Stanley Kowalski, did you – did you repeat what that – ? [Williams, 1974, p. 103].

Blanche: … All right; now, Mr. Kowalski, let us proceed without any more double-talk. I'm ready to answer all questions [Williams, 1974, p. 40].

Thus, the system of Stanley Kowalski's nominations demonstrating different modality and the characters' emotions and, accordingly, his anthroponymic identity is represented as follows: Stanley Kowalski, Mr. Kowalski, Stanley, Stan, a Polack.

The name Stella (derived from the Latin *stella* "star") whose bearer is Blanche's sister is also symbolic in the context of the play in which its meaning is revealed. Stella acts as a sort of "star" for Blanche that brought her to the Kowalskis' house. Blanche regards it as a last asylum where she hopes to find peace and quiet after disappointments and failures happened in her life. It is no mere chance that Blanche calls her sister heartily Stella for Star when she arrives at her place:

"Blanche: Stella, oh, Stella, Stella! Stella for Star! Now, then, let me look at you … I won't be looked at in this merciless glare! Come back here now! Oh, my baby! Stella! Stella for Star! … [Williams, 1974, p. 18].

In Stanley's life in the squalid suburbs of New Orleans Stella is also "a star" in its way.

Unlike Blanche who does not accept Stanley Kowalski's world Stella adapts herself to him and surrenders to fate submissively. Stella is recruited morally by the Kowalskis' world. The playwright underscores this idea by convergence of the characters' names on the basis of their consonance: Stella – Stanley.

The following forms of the character's name are used in the play:

a) the formal use of the name including the title, the forename and her husband's surname, thereby underscoring Stella's marital status:

"Blanche [uncomprehendingly]: I'm looking for my sister, Stella DuBois. I mean – Mrs. Stanley Kowalski" [Williams, 1974, p. 15].

b) the use of the title Miss and the forename as a sign of distancing:

"Blanche: …Death is expensive, Miss Stella! … Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorsteps! [Williams, 1974, p. 26]

c) the use of the full form of the name Stella indicating neutral modality:

"Blanche: … Stella, you have a maid, don't you?" [Williams, 1974, p. 22]

d) the forename backed by the accompanying appellative in postposition, suggesting its meaning:

"Blanche: … Stella, Stella for star! How lovely to have a baby. Everything's all right" [Williams, 1974, p. 44].

e) the forename intensified by the accompanying words in postposition, such as baby, sweetheart and others which manifest an affectionate and tender attitude to the character:

"Stanley: "Hey, there! Stella, Baby!" [Williams, 1974, p. 13]

"… There he throws back his head like a baying hound and bellows his wife's name: "Stella! Stella, sweetheart! Stella!" [Williams, 1974, p. 59]

f) the use of the hypocoristic form Stell as a sign of closeness:

"Stanley: Stell, it's gonna be all right after she [Blanche] goes and after you've had the baby" [Williams, 1974, p. 109].

g) the referential use of the appellative word combination *little woman* instead of the given name as a sign of the affectionate attitude to Stella:

"Stanley: Where's the little woman?" [Williams, 1974, p. 29].

Thus, Stella Kowalski's anthroponymic identity is represented in the following way: Miss Stella, Mrs. Stanley Kowalski, Stella, Stell, Baby/Stella, Stella for Star, sweetheart, the little woman.

Conclusion

As a final summary, it should be pointed out that the anthroponymic identity of the literary character as a model of a linguistic personality is the whole system of his/her nominations being the source of information about a certain pragmatic situation in the character's life, perception of his/her name(s) by the other characters and their attitude to him/her. It is specified and formed by the author in such a way that it can be one of the means of manifestation of an artistic-aesthetic conception of the literary work, and it can also help reveal its main theme and underlying sense. The anthroponymic identity is not stable and it changes as the plot of the literary work goes, showing the character in the process of evolution and reflecting his/her inner changes. Different components of the character's anthroponymic identity which become dominant and important in a certain period of his/her life may come to the fore. The character's anthroponymic identity may influence a reader and a national anthroponymicon. A name chosen by an author begins "to live" in a new phase of use, fulfilling the functions of identification and socialization, the similar processes being characteristic of real bearers' names.

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