Introduction: Social representation and naming in sociocultural discourses

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1. Introduction to the special issue

This issue is a collection of articles that share two main characteristics: they approach language use from the perspective of naming practice and group identity, and they focus on the study of naming and social representation that is constructed or represented in various sociocultural discourses. The joint theme for the five studies in this special issue was originally designed for a workshop at the XLVII Annual Conference on Linguistics in Tampere, Finland held in March 2021. The workshops addressed three partly overlapping areas: (a) naming patterns in group identity construction, (b) names as markers of social representation, and (c) naming as a tool for sociocultural inclusion and exclusion. These three themes are also addressed in the articles of the current issue.

The main focus of this issue is to study how group identity and public sociocultural representation are constructed through naming, and how naming separates and unites different groups. We address

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certain questions through separate studies: What names and terms are used when we want to show that we belong to the in-group, and what means do we have to employ to show we belong to the out-group? Are the rules of naming always the same, or can negative become positive in some contexts? What happens when someone refuses to belong to a group and, at the same time, refuses to use the group's naming practices, as has happened with e.g. the colloquial names used of people living in Helsinki (Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017)? In summary, the issue explores the variety of linguistic and cultural resources that are applied in naming in various communication cultures.

This issue thus approaches the importance of naming as an identity marker in both synchronic and diachronic data and investigates their contribution to the construction of social representation. The data studied draw on a variety of text types that implement various sociocultural discourses, including newspapers, parliamentary debates, online communication, and literature. The methodologies used include corpus-assisted discourse analysis, categorisation analysis, lexical semantic analysis, and statistical analysis.

2. Social representation

The concept of social representation derives from social psychology. It is based on (cultural) values, ideas, metaphors, beliefs, and norms shared by various groups (cf. Moscovici 1984). Representation of a particular individual or a group can manifest itself by the use of 'positive' adjectives such as *healthy*, *normal*, or *natural*. Or, by terms denoting more 'undesirable' qualities, like *unnatural*, *deviant*, or *fat* (Limatius, *this issue*). This is what van Leeuwen (2008:109) calls 'moral legitimization'; it consists of the processes of evaluation, abstraction, and comparison. People are categorised into different sociocultural groups on the basis of positive and negative values. Hence, defining who we are requires a point of comparison. When we construct our social representation, or that of others, we tend to use what is called the 'in-group' and 'out-group' discourse, which is built on the notions of exclusion and inclusion (cf. Wodak 2008). When we say that some-

one is *a lunatic*, we simultaneously mean that we, as 'sane' people, do not belong in the same group as them (Nevala & Tyrkkö, *this issue*). Or, we may place ourselves morally and intellectually higher than those we verbally abuse by calling them by the appellativised names *uuno* or *tauno*, both with derogatory meaning (Sarhemaa, *this issue*).

Van Dijk (2009:52) discusses the state of polarised discourses in terms of 'our own place'. These are places where we want to be socially, politically, and culturally autonomous – we do not want interference from above, or from outside of our own place, i.e. group, including invasion into our way of using language (i.e. sociolect, idiolect, dialect, language). As Van Dijk (2009:141) states, giving attributes to the self and others concerns the interactional and societal context. This means that defining is not only governed by macro-level norms or shared knowledge, but it is also produced in micro-level interactions and situations, i.e. in sociocultural discourses, for example, when setting urban sociospatial categories (Ainiala et al., *this issue*). Social identities and representations can be seen to evolve and vary in social interaction, not only in response to the acts and stances of other interlocutors, but also according to the speaker's own attitude towards each interactional situation (Ochs 1993:298).

In the social identity process, we tend to exaggerate the differences between groups, as well as the similarities within the same group. Consequently, it is not unusual for groups to define their identity by their common opposition to some enemy or 'out-group'. While this process can be very effective in strengthening the in-group, it does so by significantly intensifying the intergroup conflict. Intragroup consensus can be reached by conforming to group norms. This process is called 'referent informational influence' (Hogg & Abrams 1988:172), which occurs in three stages, self-categorisation (a person defines themselves with a social category or identity), norm formation (a person creates or learns the stereotypical norms for the social category), and norm representation (a person assigns the norms to themselves and starts behaving accordingly). In other words, we are influenced by others to the extent that they are in a position to be knowledgeable about group beliefs, norms, and values. That is particularly true of

individuals who are most typical (prototypical) of the in-group – they guide and lead discussions about 'who we are' and consequently 'what we should do'. We might also develop an idealised picture of certain, publicly well-known, members of the (desired) in-group, in so far as being influenced by them enough to make us change our naming practices (Kanner & Raunamaa, *this issue*).

In this special issue, social representation manifests itself, for one, in actual labels and attributes, such as proper names and terms of reference. In addition, the studies show a variety of other discursive ways in which the interlocutors' social representations are expressed. The juxtaposition of different groups and their members can appear, for example, through the act of criticism, or by defining otherness. Another important factor taken up by the studies concerns sociocultural context. Naming proves to be one of the central tools for creating and maintaining social representation, whether within modern blog writing or historical media, and literature.

3. Naming

What is a name? In brief, a name is a word or combination of words, referring to one identified person, being, subject, or object, in which case the term proper name or proper noun can be used. Onomastics has seen extensive discussions on the definition and meaning of a proper name. Besides identification, names have many functions in society and culture. A person gives a name only to the referents which they feel are worth naming (see e.g. Ainiala et al. 2016:13–16; Nyström 2016). Furthermore, by examining which referents are given names and which are left nameless, we often obtain information about the objects a society deems important and valuable.

Additionally, names often convey sociocultural information, such as the social, linguistic, and ethnic identity of people and places. Proper names are not isolated elements in any language but represent a system with different sub-systems, such as the first name system and family name systems among personal names. These systems are culture-specific. In all cultures, giving a child a name means that

they have been accepted as a member of the community. Richard Alford (1988) demonstrated that personal names express the identity of a person in two ways: for one, they tell the other members of the community who the individual in question is, and secondly, who they are expected to be. Thus, personal names have a significant role in building a person's individual and social identity, and constitute links between generations and families. Accordingly, when choosing a name for a child, name-givers may wish to connect the properties of a notable person to the child (Kanner & Raunamaa, *this issue*). Likewise, place names describe the cultural characteristics of objects and especially compared to other objects in a society and landscape.

A sociocultural perspective is fundamental in many other aspects. As a name is a word in a language that only has one referent, many different images, emotions, stances, and perceptions associated with this one special referent are attached to it. This becomes apparent in the use of slang names *Hesa* and *Stadi* for Helsinki and the demonyms derived from them (Ainiala et al., *this issue*). Geographically *Hesa* and *Stadi* identify the same city, but the images and affects connected to these names differ significantly.

Even though proper names are monoreferential, additional linguistic resources are available that can identify a referent, such as pronouns and classifying expressions (see e.g. Ainiala & Olsson 2020; Nyström 2016; Limatius, *this issue*; Nevala & Tyrkkö, *this issue*). Furthermore, the line between names and appellatives is not always clear-cut. Names associated with common images can also be used as appellatives (Sarhemaa, *this issue*).

In this issue, questions related to emotional and affective meanings of names and other identifying resources are discussed in multiple ways. By differentiating between various groups of people these meanings are utilised and even strengthened. All articles in this issue focus on the various ways to identify groups of people or individual people. Simultaneously, this issue highlights the vague and changeable line between proper names and other referential linguistic resources.

4. Issue contributions

The five contributions to this special issue offer a wide perspective on the topic of naming and representation, spanning the historical to present-day and both Finnish- and English-speaking contexts. The issue opens with Minna Nevala and Jukka Tyrkkö's study on the lexis of mental health in the British parliament and contemporary printed books from the early nineteenth century to the present day. The use of words referring to people with mental illness often reflects societal attitudes either in favour of or against particular group memberships. The semantic change that happened around the Second World War meant that terms like *lunatic* and *idiot* were not used to refer to people with diagnosed medical conditions, but rather as intensifiers or as distancing devices in intergroup relations.

In their article, Antti Kanner and Jaakko Raunamaa discuss the influence of media and literature on naming conventions in Finland between 1900 and 1939. Their statistical analysis of newspaper data shows that, contrary to common belief, people did not necessarily name their children after notable people. There are, however, some exceptions to how socially representative some first names were: the previously almost non-existent name *Ansa* only gained popularity in 1935–36 when Ansa Ikonen became one of the most famous actors in Finland.

Exploring present-day data from online discussion forums of Suomi24, Terhi Ainiala, Jarmo H. Jantunen, Salla Jokela and Jenny Tarvainen focus on the expressions of otherness. They perform a corpus-assisted discourse analysis by comparing the discursive naming practices for native and non-native Helsinkians, and those living in the capital region in contrast to those living elsewhere in Finland. Their results show that the capital city and its inhabitants have a distinctive role in people's socio-spatial thinking: for example, terms like *Hesa* and *Stadi* are used to distinguish 'us' (people living outside of the capital region) from 'them' (people living in Helsinki).

The practices of naming and describing bodies in plus-size women's fashion blogs are the subject in Hanna Limatius' article. Her analysis focuses on how bloggers use language to construct their identities

through references to bodily characteristics and how they use terms to describe bodies that are not plus-size. The results demonstrate that, while the bloggers build counter-discourse to the mainstream media discourses presenting fatness as a negative characteristic, they also maintain particular hegemonic discourses on beauty, sexuality, and gender.

In the last article of this special issue, Maria Sarhemaa studies how proper names are used as terms of abuse in Suomi24 and internet survey data. Her specific focus is on the terms *uuno*, *tauno* and *urpo*, originally Finnish male names, which are commonly used pejoratively to express negative emotions. Her results show that these three appellativised names are not synonymous, rather they have different discursive functions: *uuno* is used to ease tensions and for self-disclosure, *tauno* to refer to 'ordinary' stupidity, and *urpo* to describe intentional negative behaviour.

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