A Connection Between Nickname and Identity: Does it Reflect Intimacy or Shaming?

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Abstract. Nicknames could represent ethnicity, social standing, or social reputation, all of which are thought to have social significance. Nicknames have a form of intimacy and familiarity with one another, and they also may have negative consequences such as shaming, bullying, humiliation, etc. This study looks into the Javanese people's nicknames and their meanings, the sources of nicknames, the response when others address them, and the social functions of using nicknames. A survey of thirty respondents from East Java who have and are addressed by their nicknames instead of their real names has conducted using a questionnaire to find out the answer. The results showed the meanings of nicknames are highly diverse from one another. It turns out that the sources of nicknames are coming from their physique or appearance, their nature or characteristic, daily habits or job, real name pun, family members, certain events, and unknown sources. Also, most nicknames represent intimacy rather than shaming. Responders could accept their nicknames with various responses such as pleased, normal, and disturbed. Therefore, nicknaming people in East Java can develop a new identity with multiple meanings and origins by stressing intimacy above shaming.

Keywords: Nickname · Identity · Meaning · Intimacy · Shaming

1 Introduction

Names are more than just symbols; they denote status, accomplishment, privilege, and a sense of social organization [1]. They may convey ethnicity, social status, or social reputation, which are believed to have social meaning. Nicknames serve a variety of social functions in some sociolinguistic domains and cultural contexts, and they can be studied from a structural, functional, psychodynamic, or socio-historical approach [2]. Nicknames have both positive and negative social functions. People nickname others as intimacy and familiarity with one another in a group. Meanwhile, having a nickname can have negative consequences such as shame, bullying, humiliation, etc.

Many researchers have conducted studies on nicknames. A study of nicknames conducted by Reinaldi [3] found that there are 33 different nicknames used in daily interactions. There are various nicknames based on shorter names, characteristics, new names, specific names, resemblances, and professions.

A study on offensive nicknames has been carried out by Al-Darabsih [4]. It investigates the sources of offensive nicknames used by Jordanians in the Horan district from a

sociolinguistic perspective. The outcome is that nicknames are linked to the nickname's physical characteristics and abnormalities, negative psychological and behavioural traits, and sensitive situations and events during the nickname's lifespan. Furthermore, the same feature/trait could be the source of multiple nicknames, and it could be related to each other in a direct, symbolic, or ironic way.

Another research on nicknames is the study conducted by Mensah and Ndimele [5]. The study examines how academics' nicknames reflect intellectual characteristics, physical looks, physical defects, religious fanaticism, speaking style, and sexual escapade. The majority of lecturers' nicknames are based on their attitudes, teaching style, and socio-academic interaction with students. Few nicknames are endearing, while the bulk has negative connotations. Students use nicknames to give their lecturers personalities and social identities and form perceptions and sensitivities about their relationship with them.

Many studies have explored the sources behind people's nicknames and the function of using nicknames. However, those previous studies did not examine the emotions of those who are addressed using their nicknames by others and the social functions of using nicknames. Therefore, this study will also identify the people's emotions when others address their nicknames and the social functions of using nicknames, whether it is used as a form of intimacy, shaming, or other functions.

This study aims to reveal the Javanese the social functions of using nicknames and the emotions when others address them using their nicknames.

1.1 Nickname

Nickname is bestowed upon one by family, playmates, friends, and colleagues. They serve an important social function while also often acting as thumbnail character sketches, illustrations of quirks of personality and physical appearance, or capsule histories, selecting and amplifying some moment in one's life course that stands out [6]. Nicknames carry meanings and can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context of the community. Beyond what serves the actor's contextual goals, nicknames have no consistent and intrinsic identification. The meaning, definition, and even self-indication of nicknames are all open to interpretation. Nevertheless, cultural norms give functional classifications and determine whether certain social or physical aspects have been suitably employed as nicknames or sources of nicknames. Nicknames can serve as an instrument of social solidarity. As Skipper noted in his 1986 study of coal miners and their nicknames.

1.2 Sources of Nicknames

Names appear as a result of complex and diverse human life. Naming and defining are two processes of symbolizing a concept to refer to something referent that is outside the language [3]. The naming is arbitrary, but contemporary names can be traced through the causes or events behind the naming or mention of several words in the lexicon. The basics of addressing nicknames are based on the job, physical appearance, characteristics, pun on real name, family members, certain event, birth and place of residence, and politics [7].

1.3 Social Functions of Nicknames

Nicknames as identity are usually marked by modifying a person's name who serves as a giver of identity associated with respectable ideals and standards. Nicknames are typically employed based on various circumstances, such as for close friends, as a distinctive call relating to a person's character, attitude, physical, or psychological characteristics. As a result, the use of these nicknames might be interpreted as an expression of intimacy, with someone calling and being called to convey his intimacy.

In addition to being used in the context of intimacy, nicknames can also be a joke that leads to mocking and shaming a person's physical, psychological, and character. In this context, intimacy becomes oppression, and using a nickname has the connotation of humiliating someone using a nickname that is regarded as inappropriate. The form of a mocked nickname is frequently distinguished by aberrations, such as when the term pronounced violates applicable norms and ethics, causes harm to individuals, and is used to ostracize someone.

1.4 Symbolic Interactionism

The basic principle of symbolic interactionism theory is that humans can think, and social interactions shape their thoughts. Symbolic interactionism comprises three premises [8]. The first premise is that humans act in response to things based on the meanings they hold for them. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is generated from, or emerges from, one's social interactions with others. The third premise is that these meanings are dealt with and modified by a person's interpretative process when dealing with the items they experience. Symbolic interactionism is valuable in language study because it explains how interlocutors create meaning. Individual actors' subjective interpretations of meaning are at the heart of symbolic interactionism. The self, being an object of the human organism's own experience, must be given meaning to be considered when generating action [9]. These meanings can be regarded as sedimented in the self-concept. This aspect of the self as an object is the one that is symbolically constituted. The self is given significance as a world object through classification and descriptive characterization. It is mainly accomplished through language, as we learn to provide meaning to ourselves and receive meaning from others. As a result, distinct patterns of conduct and interaction in society lead to group differences.

2 Methods

This study is descriptive qualitative research. The research process involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the meaning of the data.

The subject of this study is 30 adolescents aged 19–22 who have nicknames and are called using their nicknames instead of their real names. The data of this research is collected using a sociolinguistic approach, focusing on the nicknames obtained by the Javanese people, especially in East Java.

The research instrument is a Google Form questionnaire. The questionnaire contained a series of questions arranged according to the research objectives. The questions given were open and closed-ended questions. It allows respondents to write their opinions so that the data obtained are more specific and accurate.

3   Results and Discussion

This section presents the result of various nicknames and their meanings. The collected data show that their nicknames come from different sources. There are various answers outside of the options given, as exemplifies in Table 1.

    This study presents that the respondents showed different responses when others called them using nicknames. The meaning of the nickname they got allows them to respond and act differently. The data also shows several social functions of nicknames. Twenty-six respondents indicate that nicknames play a role in showing intimacy with the person being addressed, while two respondents consider it was just a joke. One respondent considers that other people did not know their real name, and another respondent acknowledges that the nickname was already attached to them.

3.1   Javanese People's Nicknames and Their Meanings

The data result shows that the meaning of nicknames may refer directly, indirectly, or ironically to their intentional meanings. For example, a fat person can be nicknamed *Ndut* or *Ndut*ie 'the fat one' and *Semok* 'sexy body', which is a nickname given to a girl who has a sexy body. However, when a tall and thin person is nicknamed *Lonjong* 'oval' and a person who has a wide forehead is nicknamed *Golep* 'golf course,' they involve a figure of speech, indirectly to the intentional meanings. In other cases, the literal meaning of nicknames is entirely different from the intentional meaning. For example, *Mbah* 'grandfather' is a nickname given ironically to a person who is still 20s, but the character is like an old fortune-teller who likes to predict fusture events. Thus, the indirect meaning is the primary way to express someone's nickname. They may be related to their physique or appearance, such as *Jemblug* 'puffy cheeks', real name puns such as *Cetul* 'Bahrul', and certain events such as *Hyung* 'older brother in Korean', because he likes Korean wave.

    It can be seen from the collected data that the same person could have more than one nickname for the same or different reasons. For example, *Cemong* and *Inces* are two different nicknames that represent different characteristics; *Cemong* 'dirty' represents the personality of dumb, while *Inces* 'princess' represents the habit of being a picker captious. On the other hand, one may have two nicknames for the same reason. For example, *Hwang* 'one of the surnames in Korea' and *Hyung* 'older brother in Korean' are nicknames given to a male person who loves Korean waves, and *Jay* and *Patar* are associated with the pun of the real name Fajar.

Table 1. Nicknames and their social functions

No.	Real Name	Nickname	Intentional Meaning	Source	Address form	Social function
1.	Alviya	*Ndut*	A person with a body weight that exceeds the ideal limit (fat)	Physique or appearance	Direct	As a joke
2.	Jacklyn	*Jemblug*	puffy cheeks	Physique or appearance	Direct	Showing intimacy
3.	Dita	*Semok*	Sexy body	Physique or appearance	Direct	Showing intimacy
4.	Nadhilah	*Ndut*ie	Reflects the body that tends to be fat	Physique or appearance	Direct	Showing intimacy
5.	Kartika	*Mbak ger*	Pimp	Physique or appearance	Ironic	Showing intimacy
6.	Elfina	*Golep*	Golf course	Physique or appearance	Indirect	As a greeting
7.	Salma	*Si Arab*	The face looks like an Arab	Physique or appearance	Direct	Showing intimacy
8.	Krisna	*Lonjong*	The body is tall and thin	Physique or appearance	Indirect	Showing intimacy
9.	Liana	*Ninek*	Being talkative	Nature or characteristic	Indirect	Showing intimacy
10.	Rendy	*Kekok*	Careless	Nature or characteristic	Indirect	Showing intimacy
11.	Risma	*Cemong, Inces*	Dumb and picker	Nature or characteristic	Indirect	Showing intimacy
12.	Nadzila	*Umik*	Mother	Nature or characteristic	Indirect	Showing intimacy
13.	Difan	*Mbah*	Grandfather	Daily habit or job	Indirect	Showing intimacy
14.	Sukma	*Sukem*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
15.	Syauqil	*Xiao*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	A greeting
16.	Bahrul	*Cetul*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
17.	Uswatun	*Encus*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy

(*continued*)

Table 1. (*continued*)

No.	Real Name	Nickname	Intentional Meaning	Source	Address form	Social function
18.	Fajar	*Jay*, *Patar*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
19.	Dewi	*Wik Wik*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	As a joke
20.	Amelia	*Comel*	Cute	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
21.	Angelina	*Enji*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
22.	Eka	*Eko*	A pun on the real name	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
23.	Amy	*Komek*	Cough medicine	Real name pun	Direct	Showing intimacy
24.	Vino	*Ler*	It is taken from the Javanese word *lur/dulur* which means brother	Family member	Indirect	Showing intimacy
25.	Yoga	*Hwang*, *Hyung*	A Korean surname and "older brother" in Korean	Certain event	Indirect	Showing intimacy
26.	Yulia	*Jupe*	Her name is similar to an artist, Julia Perez (Yuli Rachmawati)	Certain event	Indirect	Showing intimacy
27.	Dian	*Sastro*	Taken from the artist's name, Dian *Sastrowardoyo*	Certain event	Indirect	Showing intimacy
28.	Dinda	*Caro*	No meaning	Unknown source	Indirect	Showing intimacy
29.	Reza	*Sate*	Satay. It has no intentional meaning	Unknown source	Indirect	Showing intimacy
30.	Dhea	*Mbod*	It has a rough meaning 'pubic hair'	Unknown source	Ironic	Showing intimacy

3.2 Sources of Nicknames

3.2.1 Physique or Appearance

Nicknames based on physical features and appearance are among the largest groupings in the obtained data, accounting for eight nicknames out of thirty. People are accustomed to passing judgment on others based on their physical appearance. Hence, nicknaming is one way that represents how/what people see and think about one another. The body and appearance are a rich source of nicknames, and they have played a role in the development of various nicknames, whether pleasant or unpleasant.

Nicknames can be sourced from a reflection of their distinctive body parts, such as the face, forehead, and body posture. For example, someone gets the nickname *Si Arab* 'Arab' because her face looks like an Arab, *Golep* 'golf course' is a parable because she has a wide forehead, and *Lonjong* 'oval' is given to someone with a tall and thin body posture.

Several people have similar nicknames that come from their physique and appearance. For example, *Ndut* 'fat', *Ndut*ie 'fat,' and *Jemblug* 'puffy' are given to people with fat body parts such as the body and puffy cheeks. Other comparable nicknames are *Semok* 'sexy body' and *Mbak ger* 'pimp.' Both have deliberate implications based on their appearance, specifically that they like to dress sexily and have voluptuous figures.

3.2.2 The Nature or Characteristic

Nicknames may reflect how people think, act, and behave. Because people may have personalities distinct from others, characteristics form one source of nicknames. 4 of the 30 nicknames revealed in the data reflect their nature or characteristics, such as talkative, careless, motherhood, fools, and picky.

In the collected data, *Ninek* 'grandmother', a nickname for someone talkative and frequently nags, like a grandmother. *Kekok* 'careless' is a nickname for someone reckless and careless. Then, *Umik* 'mother' is a term for a girl who resembles a mother or has a motherhood character, even though she is still in her twenties. Furthermore, a respondent has two nicknames derived from the same source: her characteristics. The first is *Cemong* 'fools', which refers to fools and the illiterate, and the second is *Inces* 'pr*Inces*s', which refers to her picky character.

As previously discussed, nicknames are based on characteristics that most people lack. As a result, people use these individuals' nicknames to refer to children or others around them who are picky, rebellious, careless, and so on, in order to prevent them from doing so.

3.2.3 Daily Habits or Job

Nicknames can be associated with activities that people used to conduct in their daily lives, and they have become a part of their identities. The collected data from this source is only one nickname out of 30. This is understandable given that most respondents are still in university and do not have a job that can serve as their identity. The nickname *Mbah* 'grandfather' is given to a person who is actually still 20s, but the daily habit is like an old fortune-teller who likes to predict future events because his friends often

ask questions for which the answer is unknown, he simply guesses, and his guesses are frequently correct.

3.2.4   Real Name Pun

Nicknames are socially crucial for people. Pun of a real name is one of the simple sources to create a nickname for other people. People may come up with new nicknames based on their real names because the names are so diverse and unique. They are not only nonsense or meaningless but also add a touch of humor or sarcasm. The collected data showed that this source of nicknames is the greatest, with 10 out of 30 nicknames.

The pun of the real name is divided into phonetic derivatives and semantic derivatives of the real name. The phonetic derivatives consist of four types:

(1)   Abbreviation of the real name, for example, Fajar > *Jay*
(2)   Phonetic blending, for example, Eka > *Eko*, Angelina > *Enji*
(3)   Assonance, for example, Dewi > *Wikwik*
(4)   Rhyme and rhythm, for example, Fajar > *Patar*, Bahrul > *Cetul*, Sukma > *Sukem*

Whereas, semantic derivatives have meanings that can be interpreted literally. For example, the nickname *Comel* comes from 'Amel', which means something cute in Malaysian, and *Komek* comes from 'Amy' means one of the cough medicines in Indonesia "Komix".

Borrowing words from another language to create nicknames could be considered a legitimate real name pun. For example, the nickname *Xiao* is a borrowed word from China that means 'child.' On the other hand, *Xiao* is just a pun on Syauqil's nickname in this context. Another example is *Comel*, a word from Malaysia that means 'cute.'

3.2.5   Family Members

In this study, family names are also a source of nicknames. The name for the family becomes a distinguishing feature between family members. This study discovered that the nickname *Ler*, which is derived from the abbreviation Lur with the extension Dulur, which means 'bro/brother,' is typically used to greet someone with whom one is already associated. The nickname is linked to a person due to this greeting and is utilized in everyday life.

3.2.6   Certain Events

Events and circumstances can influence nicknames. This source of the nickname has four names out of 30. Such nicknames are associated with something they like and the resemblance of their name to that of a prominent artist. For example, *Hwang* 'one of the surnames in Korea,' and *Hyung* 'older brother in Korean' are nicknames for someone who loves Korean waves. Artist hood is another source of nicknaming. For example, *Jupe* is a nickname given to a girl who has a similar name to an Indonesian actress and singer, *Jupe*, who has the original name *Yuli Rachmawati*. Then, *Sastro* is a nickname acquired by someone who has almost the same name as the Indonesian actress *Dian Sastrowardoyo*.

3.2.7   Unknown Sources

The data reveal that some nicknames exist without knowing where they came from. Some nicknames are well-known, although they have no idea why people refer to them by their nicknames. Generally, such nicknames have literal meanings. Their meanings, however, are not usually the same as the purpose for their designation. For example, *Caro* is a nickname for a girl. She indicated that the actual definition is a Madura weapon. *Sate* 'satay' is a nickname given to a boy, although there is no explanation for why he was given that nickname. *Mbod* 'pubic hair' is then presented to a female whom her close friends have addressed. On the other hand, those nicknames have nothing to do with the other sources mentioned above.

In general, none of the respondents objected to their nicknames. Even if their feelings were diverse, all respondents embraced their nicknames. This response enables people to engage in various social interactions with the addressers. Those who willingly accept their nicknames are more likely to engage in close relationships with others. Those who are upset by other people's nicknames, on the other hand, will have less interaction.

3.2.8   Social Functions of Using Nicknames

Nicknames can fulfil a social function such as intimacy or shame. According to the findings, 26 respondents saw the use of nicknames as a kind of intimacy. Only people close to them who had known them for a long period gave them nicknames. Whereas two respondents considered it was just a joke, such as *Ndut* 'fat' and *Wik Wik* from 'Dewi'. They use nicknames as a technique to make each other laugh. Two respondents assumed other people probably call them by a nickname as a greeting because they do not know their real names and the nicknames already attached to them since a long time ago such as *Xiao* from 'Syauqil' and *Golep* from 'Elfina'. This can happen when someone's closest friends address them by a nickname, and strangers call them by a nickname as well.

3.2.9   People's Responses when Others Address Their Nicknames

This study shows that the respondents showed different responses when others called them using nicknames. They create a variety of responses from the meanings that other people give them. The meaning of the nickname they got allows them to respond and act differently. Twelve respondents can accept their nicknames such as *Semok*, *Si Arab*, *Lonjong*, *Ninek*, *Kekok*, *Mbod*, *Sukem*, *Comel*, *Eko*, *Komek*, *Ler*, *Hwang/Hyung*. They are willing for others to refer to them by their nicknames. They may believe the nickname is appropriate for them. Meanwhile, 15 respondents feel normal toward their nicknames, including *Jemblug*, *Ndut*ie, *Mbak ger*, *Golep*, *Cemong/Inces*, *Umik*, *Mbah*, *Xiao*, *Cetul*, *Encus*, *Sastro*, *Jay/Patar*, *Wik Wik*, *Enji*, *Jupe*, *Caro*, and *Sate*. They may feel normal because they disregard their nicknames. The nickname remained with them, although they did not regard it as a compliment. On the other hand, a respondent showed an uncomfortable nickname, *Ndut*. She feels disturbed by that nickname because the respondent may have considered that the nickname does not accurately reflect her.

4   Conclusion

As nicknames are employed in various ways by different groups, it is essential to investigate the social role of nicknames. This study established that various nicknames in East Java contain various meanings behind them addressed directly, indirectly, and even ironically. Sources of nicknames come from people's physique or appearance, their nature or characteristic, daily habits or jobs, real name puns, family members, certain events, and unknown sources. Nicknames may come from a variety of sources, not just the ones mentioned above. Nicknames can be derived from a variety of factors, including sex, politics, psychology, and even people's flaws. The social function of utilizing nicknames as a sort of intimacy with one another was discovered in this study. The nicknames they get do not indicate any motive to ridicule or embarrass someone. The use of nicknames must also take into account the owner's emotions. Some respondents gladly embraced their nickname, indicating that it did not make them feel mocked. Others feel normal, are not upset, and are not glad. However, a respondent is offended because the term does not accurately depict her. Before clear conclusions about the social purpose of nicknames can be drawn, further research into the practice of naming nicknames in a broader range of languages is expected. Humans, especially in today's digital era, have the ingenuity to create a nickname. It would be fascinating to look into this further.

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