NICKNAMES AS THE MEANS OF VIRTUAL LINGUISTIC PERSONALITY SELF-PRESENTATION IN THE GERMAN LANGUAGE VIRTUAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: In the research, the definitions of virtual Discourse were studied, and on the ground of it the authors' own approach towards this notion was introduced, the view on the linguistic Personality in different branches of science in general and in cognitive linguistics was identified, and probable structural components of the linguistic Personality were outlined. The definitions of the virtual linguistic Personality were clarified, its specific features were highlighted, and the authors' description of this phenomenon was provided. The research methods were selected, nicknames or network names of the profiles on dating websites used by the authors (both men and women) while getting registered on dating sites were analysed. The Nickname is treated as the phenomenon of nomination, an essential means of virtual linguistic self-presentation and Internet personality image building. Having analysed empirical data, the authors divided nicknames into 18 thematic groups. The groups comprise different constituents, reflecting other preferences and tastes of men and women, their thesaurus and creativity. The frequency of using nicknames created by men and women was thoroughly studied; it was defined and, in general, the most popular are the nominations based on food names. They prevail in men and point at taste preferences and the importance of food in general. The next group comprises nicknames-zoonyms and nicknames-phytonyms, which last in women. The third most frequent is nicknames – proper names, which emphasises serious intentions and non-concealment of oneself. The least appealing for self-presentation is the nicknames-allusions. Nicknames were also classified according to their grammar structure (derivation pattern) and spelling. In general, positive self-presentation prevails, caused by the author's intentions to attract the broadest range of users and find their partners.

Keywords: Intention, Linguistic Personality, Nicknames, Self-presentation, Virtual discourse, Virtual linguistic Personality.

1 Introduction

Anthropocentric orientation of world science in the modern period has resulted in an increased interest of scholars in cognition, as the languages reflect social phenomena and a person as the creator and user of language and a person's inner world. That is why a language speaker – a linguistic personality – has become an object of research in linguistics and psychology, philosophy, ethics, economics, sociology, ethnography, as interests of all human sciences intersect in it. Linguistic Personality is a crosscutting idea that penetrates all aspects of language study and at the same time eliminates borders between disciplines that study a person, as it is impossible to study a person not considering their language [15]. Moreover, scholars focus on the new information and communication space – the Internet, which is progressing rapidly in the 21st century and fills all spheres of life influencing development, structure, characteristics, and nature of the modern linguistic Personality. The virtual space is a highly multifaceted environment, so we focused on the dating website that aims to virtual search and virtual selection of a partner.

The topicality of the research consists in the necessity to study the linguistic personality behaviour in the web-space, in particular, on the dating websites, as the phenomenon of the user self-presentation on such sites and their virtual image building belong to relevant issues of cognitive linguistics, which have not been sufficiently researched.

The research aims to analyse nicknames as the virtual linguistic personality self-presentation in the German language virtual discourse. To achieve the aim, the following objectives were set:

- To study theoretical prerequisites for Analysis of the virtual Discourse, linguistic Personality and virtual linguistic Personality;

- To develop a methodological algorithm of the research;
- To analyse peculiarities of the virtual linguistic personality self-presentation on the German dating website, both men and women, singling out certain groups of nicknames, taking into account their meanings and the frequency of using handles with similar semantic meaning and classify nicknames according to their grammar structure (derivation pattern) and spelling.

2 Literature Review

In the 21st century, it is not easy to imagine a person without a computer, Internet, mobile phone that dominates in not only business relations but also plays an essential role in the personal life of everyone. Nobody is surprised at virtual dating and virtual partner selection.

Our study focuses on the Internet discourse as part of mass media discourse. There is no unanimous opinion on the name of such type of discourse yet. According to Ovcharova [28], the notions of "computer discourse," "electronic discourse – e-discourse" and "Internet discourse" are identical, as all of them are communication actions connected with information sharing and communication among people using computers. We believe that the notion of "e-discourse" is broader than the notion of "computer discourse," but they subordinate to "virtual discourse" in its general sense.

Having analysed the definitions of "the virtual discourse" provided by Kompantseva [20] and Lutovinova [22], we consider it to be both: a set of texts devoted to the topic of partner selection and a communication event which has its differential features, such as this event is distant, prolonged in time, the interaction takes place between the subject of selection as an addresser and a potential addressee, the one who is attracted by the addresser's appeal which has the form of direct speech, but as discourse process results in the texts characterised by both intra- and extra-textual (under the influence of discourse process) peculiarities [29, p. 59].

The linguistic personality studies in virtual discourse are also relevant as the person is the primary measure and the main sense of the virtual world [22]. This notion has acquired particular importance in recent decades due to the rapid development of different branches of linguistics [3, 13]. According to Bogin, the linguistic Personality is characterised not by what they know about the language but by what they can do with it [3]. In psychology, Personality is understood as a relatively stable organisation of motivational tendencies that appear in biological stimuli and social and physical environment and conditions [15]. Shakhovsky adds the emotional component and explains that there is a person behind any text, and a person is an emotional creature [32]. The Ukrainian psycholinguist Zasiekina considers the linguistic Personality to be a set of cognitive, emotional and motivational features that provides linguistic competence of a person as a representative of certain national cultural space [39, p. 83, 40].

The linguistic Personality is understood as a set of texts created both by people and about them on the Internet. Still, the linguistic Personality's adequate features may be found in the texts produced by them, especially in spontaneous non-formal communication [36, p. 40]. According to Kompantseva, the virtual linguistic Personality is a discourse version of the linguistic Personality presented in the language space of the Web, fixed in communication strategies and tactics of communication, types of linguistic behaviour, meanings of hypertext fragments, lingua-cognitive peculiarities of thesaurus [20, p. 21–22].

It is indisputable that participants of the virtual Discourse can never be sure about who their communication partners are in reality [22, p. 86]. The actual "Self" of a person in a virtual

space is always vague and uncertain, as there is a potential possibility for "multiple identity" in it [18, p. 190]. In scientific works on psychology, four types of identity image on the Internet have been described: (1) authentic identity image; (2) idealised identity image; (3) false identity; (4) game online self-presentation [4, 42]. Gaining a better position to receive social approval by others might be the intention underlying untrue statements of the users in the context of mate choice on online dating sites [41]. The reliability of the information provided during self-presentation depends on a person's psychological well-being [33].

Under the condition of inner welfare, the addresser can give accurate, truthful information and cannot change their image. The general feeling of inner trouble is a good reason that predetermines the distortion of the Self-image in the process of self-presentation, so the person depressed by this feeling often uses the possibility to change their image for communication on the Internet [34]. Insensitive online groups nicknames play a significant role in identity construction [35].

To sum up, we consider the virtual linguistic Personality to be an integrated phenomenon in which certain individual features are in the foreground, which, in our case, is caused by intentions (self-characteristics and the influence on the addressee) that may be expressed verbally (a nickname, a text) and non-verbally (for example, a profile picture) and are constructed due to anonymity which is ensured by virtual reality thus providing freedom of action and freedom of expression.

The virtual linguistic personality self-presentation is at the centre of attention of Ukrainian and foreign scholars. In particular, the differences between potential virtual and non-virtual partners are studied [6], the phenomenon of information distortion (both personal and of other people) by authors in the profiles of online dating, which often seem to be promising, can be traced [5], the possible gender differences in self-presentation on the dating sites by the representatives of LGBTQ communities of southern countries are highlighted [26], as well as the connection of gender differences of self-presentation and hyper-personal effects with evolutionary and psychological theories [2], and also in-/ability of the respondents to guess unique features of users correctly just reading their nicknames [21]. In the overview of the references devoted to the study of handles as the means of virtual Personality self-presentation on the German dating sites, we have found very few works on this topic.

3 Materials and Methods

Considering the interdisciplinary character of the phenomenon of the virtual linguistic personality self-presentation, to solve the tasks outlined, we have utilised the procedure which is based on the integrated approach aimed at studying the Personality and different manifestations of their being via a thorough study of linguistic activity and language as the main component of person's consciousness [40]. As the research material is the nicknames selected by the method of continuous sampling on the German dating site FlirtCafe, the users of which have the purpose of finding a partner for communication, flirtation, short-term or long-term relations, or to create families.

The dating site FlirtCafe provides its users with free trial registration for ten days, which allows them to see their guest list, other users' profiles, the photo gallery, and sent them messages in the chat. After this trial period, accessible functions are restricted to looking through only one profile a day. To register, the user has to provide the username, e-mail, password, date of birth, postcode, sex, the sex of a would-be partner. The site allows registration for people aged from 16 to 60 and older. After registration, it is obligatory to provide detailed personal information (general information, describing oneself, outlining the requirements for a potential partner, one's appearance, a favourite pastime, autobiography). The field where the user provides their Nickname is obligatory, and the Nickname will be visible with the avatar (if there is any) and with a quick search even to unregistered users (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – German dating site: registration page

There are also options for searching with the help of nicknames. To do it, you need to enter some letters, and in the Search field, you will see all aliases containing this combination of letters (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – German dating site: the focus is on the Nickname Search field

The third option is about the more detailed search in which one can limit the search with such criteria as the sex, age, (marital) status (single, in relations, divorced, widow/widower), country, region (with the help of the postcode), a photo is a must.

So, the authors' intentions while creating their nicknames are of particular interest as they are a name card, a constituent of the linguistic Personality, a linguistic mask on the Internet and one of the significant possibilities for virtual self-nomination and self-presentation at the pre-communication level. The Nickname may be treated as a source of symbolic information about its author, as a person's projection of their way of perceiving life, thoughts and feelings, inner world, subjective experience [33, p. 413].

The integrated methodology has been used at this level: *the interpretation analysis* – to interpret meanings of the nicknames used by people on dating websites to nominate themselves for self-presentation and *intent analysis* – to find out their intentions. The intention is the addresser's meaningful or intuitive thought (purpose), which defines the inner speech program and the way to actualise it [14]. To ensure the validity of the results and to determine the frequency of specific linguistic units' usage by virtual linguistic personalities – the site's users, both men and women, and for quantitative comparative characteristics, we have utilised *the method of quantitative calculations.* Empirical research suggested analysing nicknames of 320 users, 160 women and 160 men, who were trying to find partners using the dating site. The empirical data were collected during the year 2019. While selecting the items, special attention was paid to the sex, and the age of users was limited (from 20 to 65 years old).

4 Results and Discussion

The specific features of the virtual linguistic Personality are the Nickname or pseudonym, for which characters of movies or books, names of social roles, as well as animals or plants may be used; the profile picture, which is a variety of visual images of a

personality, for example, graphics, photos and images of objects; profile as personal information about users, their virtual status in the Internet space [38]. There is an opinion that a nickname is some sobriquet. Still, we support the view of the German scholar Schlobinski [31], who claims that there is some difference between a nickname and a sobriquet, as the Nickname is chosen or created by the person on their own, it is an informal anthroponym and the means of self-presentation and self-identification [16]. In contrast, an alias is created by other people. It is a reflection of the attitude towards a person for who this sobriquet is made. Nicknames play more than just a referential function. From the perspective of their creator's intentions, nicknames point at some critical aspects for themselves and others [31].

In this process, an important role is played by motivational factors and people system of values as it influences the choice of the way to present oneself and build a person's image. It is also considered that the Nickname as a virtual projection of oneself affects not only other users but also the authors themselves as they adapt to the role chosen and try to fully comply with it [33]. At the same time, either concealment of the true Self or, vice versa, more disclosure than in honest communication. The specificity of linguistic presentation depends on such factors as the level of education, culture, intentions and the aim outlined. From the psychological point of view, the virtual linguistic personality characteristics are connected with self-expression. "A person-image" in virtual reality is practically identical to the symbol created by them [37]; therefore, the importance of a nickname for potential partners increases; they either open the user's profile to get acquainted with other information or skip it. The Nickname plays the role of a predictor regarding the unique features and the strategy to choose a partner. It may influence the motivation to contact the user whose Nickname has evoked interest [1].

Based on the classification and description of nicknames by Schlobinski [31], Kaziaba [16, 17], Gkoutzourelas [11], Lutovinova [22] and Knatz [19] and the Analysis of empirical data (320 profiles: 160 of men and 160 of women), taking into account the motivation of users registered on the dating site FlirtCafe [7], we have singled out certain groups, which are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Groups of the users of the dating site nicknames

No.	The name of the group	Number of men out of 160 in (%)	Number of women out of 160 in (%)
1.	Nicknames based on the names of food	14,38	9,38
2.	Nicknames-zoonyms and -phytonyms	7,5	13,75
3.	Proper Names	7,5	8,12
4.	Nicknames that reflect psychological-emotional state of communicators	3,12	8,12
5.	Based on the names of means of transport	2,5	11,25
6.	Neologisms	8,75	5
7.	Precedent names	7,5	4,38
8.	Nicknames based on the names of professions	7,5	3,75
9.	Nicknames-self-assessment	5	6,25
10.	Leetspeak-names	3,75	6,88
11.	"Incognito"-nicknames	4,38	5,63
12.	Shifts /clusters	3,75	5
13.	Nicknames with sexual content	5,63	2,5
14.	Nicknames based on geographical names	3,12	3,75
15.	Nicknames based on the names of musical instruments / sounds	5	0,63
16.	Alliterations	2,5	3,12
17.	Ironic names	2,5	1,88
18.	Allusions	2,5	1,25

We have found out that the biggest group is the one comprising (see Figure 3) *nicknames based on the names of food* (11,88%), 14,38% of men and 9,38% of women have chosen such names in the Internet.
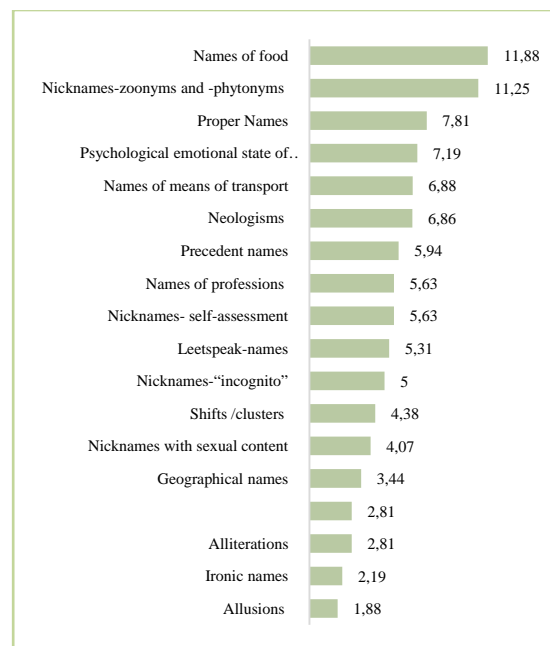

Group	%
Names of food	11,88
Nicknames-zoonyms and -phytonyms	11,25
Proper Names	7,81
Psychological emotional state of..	7,19
Names of means of transport	6,88
Neologisms	6,86
Precedent names	5,94
Names of professions	5,63
Nicknames- self-assessment	5,63
Leetspeak-names	5,31
Nicknames-"incognito"	5
Shifts /clusters	4,38
Nicknames with sexual content	4,07
Geographical names	3,44
	2,81
Alliterations	2,81
Ironic names	2,19
Allusions	1,88

Figure 3 – Filling percentages (%) of the nickname groups (men and women altogether)

We have singled out two categories: *a) names of sweets / dishes*: men – *schockokecks, Zwiebelkuchen, bonbons, duplopraline, Edel Marzipan88, Mozartkugel 77, sauerbraten, kirschtorte, Rippchen7539, Schweinebraten, schnitzelll, Currywurst1963, weisswurst, Obstsalat03*; women – *Icecream070190, schokolade21, Nougatpraline10, Kecksi, Marzipanerin, marzipan25, mozartkugel, schnitzel12584, nutella60, Sachertorte XL; b) names of drinks*: men – *piccolo2602, sekt19, sekt_, Rotwein80, BIER, Gurkenschnaps, ruebenschnaps, glühwein72*; women – *weissweinsüß, Glühwein-Hmbg, Cherrybrandy, TequiLaaa89, brandyheiß*. Nicknames with such content may contribute to the assumption that "I-corporeal" play the major role for such people, as according to Maslow, human needs concerning biological survival have to be met at the lowest level before any needs at a higher-level start actualizing [24]. We believe that such nicknames represent people's taste preferences which are often related to character or certain psychological problems. It is also noteworthy that only alcoholic drinks were chosen for nicknames and there is a German saying *"Sag mir was du trinkst, und ich sage dir, wer du bist!"* [10], and some modern mobile apps (for example, ONCE) can provide interpretation of character of such nicknames authors.

Quite a big number of users present themselves using *nicknames-zoonyms and -phytonyms* (11,25%), namely, 7,5% of men and 13,75% of women: men – *tigerle57, Koalabär88, Falke585, ahorn34, zeder, buche74, bambus_22, bambusman, Löwenzahn80, silbertanne* – men associate themselves mainly with hardwood, and even with fir, which, on the one hand, is a symbol of fertility, on the other hand – a symbol of strength [9]; women – *Redrose19, Rosenduft, Löwenzahn, SonnenblumeBrB, Linde53, Kornblume54, ruhrstute, Camomile79, Fauleziege, affe1979, maihenne, Haifischvieh, Kuschelmaus*. Some women choose flowers, which illustrates their elegance and beauty. Concerning animals, the gender aspect should be emphasized as men look for names of animals of masculine gender *(derbär38 – bear, wolf79 – wolf, etc.)*, but women look for the names of animals of feminine gender *(stute84 – mare84, milkakuh– milk-cow, etc.)*. It is also interesting that diminutives are mainly used by women *(Häschen68, _Kätzchen_)*, who try not only to show tender in such a way, but also may try to "reduce" their age or weight a bit. This group also contains some nicknames based on the names of insects – *entonyms*, for example, *PapillonBlonde (franz. butterfly), mariposa (span. butterfly), Farfalla (ital. butterfly)* – their authors associate themselves with the lightness of a butterfly, and there is one nickname based on the name of a

bird – *ornithonym*: *Falke585*, which is considered to be a magical bird because of its clairvoyance, speed and greatness, but at the same type it is a predator [23], so, the user with such name may have both positive and negative features. As such nicknames are rather rare, we do not classify them into a separate group, but include them into the group of zoonyms. The nickname *Faaleziege* is of special interest – on the one hand, it may be ironic or self-assessment, on the other hand, laziness is not a positive feature, but some people think that a person should idle about for a while, as only then creative and brilliant ideas can be born. Some scholars claim that lazy people have higher intellectual development [25], so the author of this nickname wants to attract attention and encourage others to consider and look through her profile to understand what is hidden behind it. Nicknames of this group are the most popular among women comparing to other groups.

7,81% of users choose *proper names* for their nicknames (women – 8,12%, men – 7,5%), divided into the following subgroups: *a) orthonyms:* men – *georg1951, Tobias, Timur79, Daniel14;* women – *SvEnJa.-, Olga1234, Dagmar, Anna, Anastasia, Katrin77*; *b) abbreviations or diminutive forms:* men – *Charly (of German Karl), Andi (of German Andreas)*; women – *Antje@ (contracted of Anna), milla2005 (of German Camilla)*; *c) derived from proper names or surnames:* men – *sebastain, groeG, saerdna70, NoTnA, Oinotna*; women – *Eiramesor (Rosemarie), einafetS01 (Stefanie01), alesig (Gisela), agleh_56 (helga_56), nirak (Karin).* Users with such nicknames may be characterised as, on the one hand, too selfish, who strive to show that they have no fears, courageous and do not depend on other people's opinions, they do not conceal their authentic Self and are interested in serious relations; on the other hand, nicknames created based on their real names may point at insufficiently developed imagination or lack of desire to waste time on making up something more interesting [22, p. 101]. Besides, proper names in a pet form hint at some flirtation, declare friendly attitude, desire to informally communicate with other people, perhaps, the intention to look younger.

7,19% of addressers have chosen nicknames that reflect *psychological emotional state of communicators,* and they may be divided into two categories: a) men – *reneeinsam, Hopeless, allein, lonely22, Unzufriedener;* women – *QhopelessQ, einsamesherz73, einsamesgirl24, Glückslos1, THESINGLEST.* Their authors are deep in sad thoughts and feel lonely and unhappy. With the help of the Internet, they hope to find consolation, moral support, and a positive attitude, but such online names may also negatively impact finding a partner. Still, the Nickname will be remembered for a long time. There is another category, in which the addresser is satisfied with life and themselves – men – *Lucky-H1, Sunnyboy22001, DerschöneRob, LukDerBeste, derGlückliche90;* women – *happyich, HappyStern, happyness1234, Happyhippo88, glückskäfer, Glücksklee09, vielglück40, Glück2010* – and seems to encourage to make a choice: *look, how lucky I am, life will be good and straightforward with me!* It should be emphasised that women (8,12%) like such nicknames more than men (3,12%). It is related to the fact that women are more emotional than men and often show their emotions, unlike men who try to hide them or disguise them.

The groups that contain *nicknames based on means of transport* (6,88%) and *neologisms* (6,86%) are almost equal in capacity, but there is considerable gender variety within each one. 11,25% of women created their nicknames based on means of transport: *mazdamx56, opelastra308, audiline28, Skoda61, Mazdaspeed, Teslababy, Toyotababy, VW-schnuffy1987, Miss.Opel, hondagirly123, porschebiene, Porsche_Lady, opelmaus26, BMW-Luder, bmw. Engel, bmwbunny500, Ladybenz, Hammerbraut2803* and only 2,5% of men have chosen such nicknames, which points to the fact that a car is a means of men travel, nothing more. But women often use the name of a car in their nicknames and combine it with some lexical units with evaluative connotations, which help attract attention to the author of such a nickname. In general, such nicknames reflect either the author's ownership of a specific make of cars or her

positive attitude to such a make. Besides, it also reflects self-sufficiency and independence.

Nicknames-neologisms show a different tendency, they prevail in men – 8,5%, in women – 5%: men – *cyberpunk74, Cyberpirat82* – innovations with the component *cyber-* have become especially popular after the Internet penetrated into all spheres of human activity, they point at a person, object or thing, related to the Internet; *hacker10, OmegaMann53 (Omega-male53), Alphamann58 (Alfa-male58), spamer86 (spammer86), bot22, Blockbuster, dampfer46 (the one who smokes electronic cigarettes46), Offliner (the one who does not use the Internet purposefully), Infotainer (a presenter of the entertaining and information TV show at the same time), Youngtimer65 (young (car)65), einweichei88 (a mild man);* women – *Surferin, digitalspionin (digital spy), cybercat86, Cyberspace, cyberwomen30, It-girl87* – the users with such nicknames want to show not only their creativity, but also their skills in the spheres of the Internet and IT using which they try to find partners. But sometimes it may have a negative effect as such people may be addicted.

5,94% of users get registered with *the nicknames based on the precedent names* (8,75% of men and 5% of women): men – *Apollo06* – everyone knows the name of the ancient Greek God Apollo and the author considers himself to be sun-faced and want to emphasize it; *Amor37* – this man tries to show that it is difficult to resist him, he strikes right in the heart and evokes the feeling of love; *Achilleus* – the user presents himself as a hero of the Trojan war, as a symbol of courage and beauty, but such people often have their weak place – the so-called "Achilleus heel"; *Narziss42* – a handsome son of the river God Cephissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in the mirror, nowadays – a self-centered person who choosing such a nickname emphasizes that to confirm their own existence and their own value they always need somebody else [30]; *Welfenkoenig (German noble dynasty)* – such nickname points out at the fact that this person tries to appear powerful and domineering as such features were typical of welfs and they have to impact a potential partner; *Oedipus, edip22* – a hero of the myth about Oedipus who by coincidence killed his father and married his mother and then having learnt about the tragedy of the situation put out his eyes (a man who has chosen such a nickname may be characterised as the one who loves his parents very much – the Oedipal Complex, known in psychology) [8]; women – *afrodita* – a Greek Goddess of beauty, happy love and marriage who surpasses all goddesses in beauty and gracefulness, and the author of this nickname tries to show it; *Venera38* – in Roman mythology – a Goddess of gardens, beauty and love – the person with such nickname highlights such features; *Fortuna1* – a Goddess of happiness and luck – it should mean that her partner will be lucky with her; *junona_22* – an ancient Italian supreme Goddess, a wife of Jupiter, a patroness of motherhood – the implicit meaning here is that this woman will be a perfect wife and mother. In some cases, it is difficult to find out what exactly the linguistic Personality wants to express by their Nickname, for example, *Elektra40, elektra26* – there is Electra Complex, studied by psychology [8]. Electra was excessively obsessed with her father, and it may have caused the choice of such Nickname, or a woman may associate herself with the main heroine of the film Elektra (2005), who works as an assassin. Still, when overwhelmed with feelings, she refuses to carry out her task and starts to rescue the target. The Nickname *angelamerkel997* is also interesting from the point of view of its interpretation – either the person tries to resemble the Chancellor of Germany, who is a powerful woman both in her own country and in the world, by demonstrating her authoritative character, or the user wants to highlight her average looks.

The *nicknames based on professions* and *nicknames-self-assessment* comprise the same number of items – 5,63% accordingly. But the first group is two times more popular with men – 7,5%: *derNotarzt, Dein_Lehrer, lehrerdom, lehrer434, ABCLehrer, TheJudge70, Prokurist, Trabifahrer, Ingenieur, fotojournalist, maler83, Chirurge;* women (3,75%) – *Putzfrau, friseuse, Zahnärztin, tierärztin, Frauenärztin, StrengeLehrerin.*

The examples illustrate that women are not entirely eager to use words of occupations for their nicknames, but for men, their profession or trade may play the most crucial role in their lives. They identify themselves as personalities that realise themselves primarily in their career, which they implicitly express. Self-assessment is important for both sexes almost equally, 6,25% of women got registered under such nicknames: *TRAUMFRAU_, Barbiepüppchen, leckere21, zauberhaft1967, misscharming, sternchen079, sonnenschein9, Biest0881, theBEST* and 5% of men: – *Grobian, Schizo83, granitmann, Romantic, mr_nice21, Feuerdrache76, thehero, SugarboyXXL*. The authors try to stand out, mentioning certain features of character or appearance that may appeal to the addressee. Moreover, men use such nicknames as snapper and *schiso* as if they challenge somebody, while positive self-assessment prevails in women.

5,31% of users have used *Leetspeak-names* [27]: men (3,75%) – *r3ptile (reptile), Schl4ppohr (Schlappohr), n00b1234 (noob1234), Sum1 (someone), tomm42 (tomman), TR4UMPRINZ;* women (6,88%) – *H3RZ_DAM3_ (HERZ_DAME), b4bylein, sw33tb4by, s0nnenschein, Ang3lgr81, chaos_3ngel, Feuer3ngel, Sw33TL0L4, SW33T-L4DY, sw33th3@rt, Laura_b4by*. The users with such names either want to be secretive as it is not always easy to decipher those streams of letters and figures or show the hacker jargon they wish to appeal to potential partners.

5% of users have used *the incognito-nicknames*: men (4,38) – *IncognitoX, mr.incognito, Incognito666, guyincognito42, MmisterXx, misterxyz, wmxxl;* women (5,63) – *MissisX, xyzamazone, mrs.xyz, xyztreff, xxxincognitoxxx, Geheim1991, geheimnis01, unbekannte*. Anonymity is the priority for such people, besides, mystery always attracts attention, most people try to solve it. The group of *shifts / clusters* is a bit smaller: men – 4,38%: (3,75%) – *ichliebedich515, wobistdu1962, ichbinallein89, IchFindeDich, Ichsuchedich09, IchBinFürDichDa;* women (5%) – *baldistsommer, oOLoveIsBlindOo, ichbinallein12, ichwarteaufDich, ichliebedich12, ichbincool12, takemeaway, HabnochHoffnung* – they often render the real meaning and intentions, for example, *I am waiting for you, take me away, I will find you, etc.* Some users (4,07%) have created *the nicknames with sexual content:* men (5,63%) – *sven21sex, eros53, ladiesMan26, derVerführer, loveman08, lovelyboy, letsgobaby, sexxyTiggerRene, sexyboy82;* women (2,5%) – *AphrodisiaK, viagra67 sexysandy82, sexymiss*. The users with such nicknames know exactly what is important for them in relations and in such a way they advertise their intensions and give the possibilities to the addressees to make up their minds about the choice much quicker. The nicknames of people who were looking for an intimate partner have not been analysed.

The group of *the nicknames based on geographical names* is not very big – 3,44%: men (3,12%) – *greece77, deutscher, sueddeutscher81, russe199;* women (3,75%) – *hessenhenne, zugspitze, spreewald83, Spreenixe, bodenseemieze, Bodenseehexe1955*. Such nicknames mainly point to where the person is from or where the users live now. Women may also add attributes to make the Nickname more attractive – *Hessen hen, Bodensee pussy, etc.*
The nicknames based on the names of musical instruments are not very popular (2,81%): men – *Flöte, tamtam1990, Bassposaune, Gitarre68, MrSaxophon, orgel44, Dr_Trommel, DerFagottist* – these nicknames often illustrate that people either make music or like a particular musical instrument; women – *gitarre123* – only one woman was identified. Other groups which are relatively small are: *alliterations* (2,81% – men – *buzzfuzz01, qiuck-nick30, JayJay;* women – *CocaCola23, MaayMaay, OoLuluoO); ironic names* (2,19% – men – the Nickname *CowboyXL* and his profile picture show that this man is tall, stocky and a bit inclined to corpulence; *eagle0027* – the hairdo (seen in the picture) of this character in the style of "hedgehog" boosted the idea for such a nickname; *Wackeldackel33* – dachshund nodding its head, it means that such person is characterised by non-stability and variability; women – *superviagra67, Schnapsdrossel, corona_80); allusions*

(1,88% – men – *hermannwings* – the cheap airlines Germanwings of the Lufthansa group are rather famous; *Indeego* – the person associates her-/himself with indigo children who are considered to have high IQ, telepathic abilities, extreme sensitivity; *Xeros* – the combination of the words Xerox (the name of the company) and Eros – the Greek God of love, *Alexus* –Alex+Lexus; women – *OnENighTLonG* – the modification of a common notion ONS – Onenightstand – i.e. a person looks for not for entertainment but for long-term relations, and it is presupposed by the Nickname; *alphafrau60* – derived from *Alphamann* – a strong woman, a leader.

In addition to the classification according to the semantic criterion, several groups based on the morphological or syntactic structure of nicknames and orthography of graphostylistics have been singled out [31]. Some most popular examples are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Classification of nicknames based on their structure and orthography

Morphological classification		
Part of Speech		
- noun		- *Zwiebelkuchen, Chirurge, Flöte, Trabifahrer, Putzfrau, friseuse, zugspitze*
- adjective		- *zauberhaft1967, leckere21*
- adverb		- *allein, lonely22*
Word-building		
- monosyllabic		- *BIER, sekt_*
- polysyllabic		- *Marzipanerin, Surferin, friseuse, Ingenieur*
• composite		• *bodenseemieze, granitmann, fotojournalist, silbertanne, Gurkenschnaps, sauerbraten*
• reduplication		• *JayJay, MaayMaay*
• univerbation		• *StrengeLehrerin, derbär38, takemeaway, IchBinFürDichDa*
• derivation diminutive		• *tigerle57, Häschen68, _Kätzchen_*
• blend		• *Alexus, Xeros*
Syntactic classification		
Syntactic criterion		
- word-combination		- *DerschöneRob*
- sentence		- *IchFindeDich, letsgobaby, ichwarteaufDich*
Orthography/Graphostylistics		
Spelling		
- all letters are small		- *weisswurst,bodenseemieze, reneeinsam*
- all letters are capital		- *BIER, THESINGLEST*
- with small and capital letters		- *derNotarzt,*
- capital letter at the beginning		- *Bassposaune*
- capital letter at the end		- *groeG*
- capital letter at the beginning and at the end		- *AphrodisiaK*
- spelt as one word		- *ichwarteaufDich, derVerführer*
- punctuation mark		- *Miss.Opel*
- figures		- *Amor37, Narziss42, zauberhaft1967, ichbincool12*
- symbols		- *Antje@, junona_22, corona_80)*
- Leetspeak		- *sw33tb4by, H3RZ_DAM3_*

Numerous graphic peculiarities that occur in different groups function as means of attraction. Communication is carried out in writing first, so spelling and structure perform the same function as gestures and mimics play in general contact [11]. Moreover, the spelling of nicknames helps define how extraordinary the person is.

It is noteworthy that the interpretation of nicknames is always somewhat subjective as its whole meaning is known only to its author. Besides, there are cases when the user doesn't think over the importance of the Nickname, name themselves by intuition or association, having liked the Nickname on some different site which may negatively influence the process of achieving their aims as the Nickname is their name card and confirmation of the (virtual) identity chosen by them as part of media self-presentation [12].

5 Conclusion

So, the Internet has changed all spheres of life. Such important phenomenon as searching and choosing the partner is carried out virtually more and more often. The virtual discourse has its peculiar features; it is both a set of texts devoted to one topic (in our research, it is the topic of choosing a partner) and a communication event with its differential features. Research into discourse (virtual one in particular) confirms linguistic Personality's importance for the communication process. Linguistic Personality on the Internet is a set of texts created by and about them. Virtual linguistic Personality is a discursive version of linguistic Personality presented in the language space of the Internet, an integrated phenomenon in which certain individual features are in the foreground which is caused by intentions in our case study (self-characteristics and influence on the addressee), which may be expressed verbally and non-verbally (for example, a profile picture) and be constructed according to author's desire due to anonymity provided by virtual reality which also includes freedom of action and freedom of expression – the Nickname as a specific feature of linguistic personality functions as the means of linguistic self-presentation. One may find the symbolic projection of a real personality with their experience, psychological components, and problems. The Analysis of empirical data made it possible to single out 18 semantic groups of nicknames and classify them according to their structure and spelling. The most popular options for nicknames creation are:

- Food names.
- Zoonyms and phytonyms.
- Proper names.
- The psychological and emotional state of communicators.
- Terms of means of transport and neologisms.

The different number of items in the groups illustrates different tastes and preferences of men and women, their thesaurus, creativity and intentions of the authors to present themselves to the best advantage as positive self-presentation prevails.

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