ANTHROPONYMY IN RUSSIAN FOLK TALES AS A MEANS OF CHARACTERIZATION

A.A. Jalilova
Republic of Uzbekistan, Gulistan State University, lecturer
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18677413

Abstract. *The article explores anthroponyms in Russian folk tales. It examines the main types of character naming and their role in shaping the artistic world of the tale: personal names, diminutive and affectionate forms, status and kinship designations, the formula "name + epithet or status," as well as evaluative and "speaking" (meaningful) names. The study shows that a name in a folk tale is not limited to simple identification: it shapes the reader's expectations, conveys a moral evaluation of a character, helps organize the narrative structure, and reflects cultural ideas about beauty, wisdom, strength, justice, and social hierarchy. Anthroponyms function as a mechanism of semantic compression, concentrating information about a character's role and anticipating their actions within the plot pattern of the fairy tale. As a result, anthroponymy appears as a significant element of folklore poetics and an important source for understanding the traditional worldview.*

Keywords*: anthroponym, onomastics, Russian folk tale, speaking names, folklore poetics, functions of a name.*

Introduction

Anthroponymy in the Russian folk tale is one of the most important elements of its poetics. Under conditions of folklore typification and economy of descriptive means, a character's name often becomes a "short formula" of the image: it sets the addressee's expectations, marks a social role, and helps distinguish characters in the chain of events. Unlike realistic narration, where a name may be neutral, in a fairy tale it is closely connected with the hero's functions and with the value system of traditional culture. The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that anthroponyms in fairy tales capture folk axiology and cultural stereotypes, and also demonstrate the link between naming practices and the genre's formulaic nature. The purpose of the article is to describe anthroponyms in Russian folk tales from structural-semantic and functional perspectives.

In onomastics, an anthroponym is understood as a proper name of a person, including given names, surnames, nicknames, and other individualizing designations [1]. When analyzing folklore, it is important to consider the genre's specificity: a character may be named not by an individual personal name, but by a social role or kinship designation (e.g., "tsar," "merchant," "old man," "stepmother"), and such a nomination will function as an anthroponym because it provides stable identification within the text. Folklore poetics emphasizes the functionality of a character in a tale: a character is defined by what they do in the plot; therefore, naming is often correlated with the role and becomes part of stable formulas [2]. A formula fixes not so much individuality as the type and behavioral plan. As a result, the tale's anthroponymy is closer to a system of roles than to a system of "passport" (official) names.

Magic (wonder) tales are characterized by an expansion of the naming system through mythological characters and personified forces. Although, strictly terminologically, "Koschei,"

"Baba Yaga," and "Morozko" may be classified as mythonyms or demononyms, within the fairy-tale text they function as the names of acting characters and perform tasks similar to anthroponyms: they individualize a participant in the action, take their role, and carry evaluative semantics. The fairy tale relies on repetition and formulas. This is evident in the model "name + attribute" (e.g., "Ivan Sarevich," "Vasilisa the Beautiful," "Marya Morevna"), where the name and epithet form a single semantic complex.

Research Material and Methods

The material for the study was drawn from Russian folk-tale texts published by A. N. Afanasyev. For in-depth analysis, wonder-tale plots were selected in which naming is most closely connected with the system of roles: the hero, the antagonist, the helper, the donor, and the dispatcher (sender). Methods: descriptive (recording names and their variants), structural-semantic (analyzing formation models and semantics), functional (relating anthroponyms to plot roles), and contextual (considering the co-text of the name and the repeatability of formulas). Interpretation relies on folkloristic views of the formulaic nature of fairy-tale narration [3] and on onomastic data on the evaluative nature of proper names in artistic speech [4].

Results and Discussion

A frequent layer is formed by traditional personal names (Ivan, Vasilisa, Marya). They function as signs of the hero's "folk" character and create an effect of closeness to the listener's world. A personal name often serves as a neutral core to which status components and epithets are attached. In Afanasyev's texts, such names migrate from one plot to another and become recognizable cultural constants. Diminutive forms (Ivanushka, etc.) add an emotional coloring. Suffixal models (-ushk-, -enk-, -onk-) intensify the motif of youth and vulnerability. In narration, a diminutive name often coexists with a status designation, producing a semantic contrast (weakness at the beginning of the journey – strength in the outcome). Status designations (sar, sarevich, sarevna, merchant, soldier) perform the function of social identification and save descriptive effort: the addressee immediately understands the character's position in the hierarchy and the expected duties. The evaluative side of status is also important: "tsarevich" marks a character as a potential winner and heir, while "soldier" marks a bearer of everyday cunning and practical wisdom. Kinship nominations (stepmother, stepdaughter, brother, sister, mother) have high plot significance: they typify relationships and often trigger the conflict scheme. The nomination "stepmother" in many variants works as a stable negative marker, while "stepdaughter" signals ordeal and injustice.

Formulas such as "Vasilisa the Beautiful," "Ivan Sarevich," and "Marya Morevna" create a stable image and support composition: repeatability facilitates oral retelling, provides rhythm, and ensures recognizability. Epithets and status components act as "semantic accelerators," replacing extended characterization. Evaluative formulas such as "Koschei the Deathless" establish the character's key semantics. In them semantic compression is especially noticeable: the name anticipates the model of behavior and the type of denouement (reward or punishment). Such nominations function as ready-made portraits embedded in the language of the tale. Russian suffixal resources actively participate in forming fairy-tale anthroponymy.

Diminutive suffixes (-ushk-, -enk-, -onk-) create an emotional-evaluative coloring; they may lower status in an initial position and strengthen the addressee's sympathy. In status naming, components associated with titles and social roles ("Sarevich") are significant, historically and morphologically establishing affiliation with power. In some formulaic names, the second component is perceived as a poetic indicator of unusualness. For example, in "Marya Morevna,"

the component “Morevna” enhances fairy-tale conventionality and marks the heroine as a figure of special status. In the formula “Finist – the Bright Falcon,” the second component functions as a symbolic epithet, expanding the name into an image-metaphor.

The anthroponym holds the character in the narrative and prevents the mixing of roles. In multi-character wonder-tale plots, this ensures coherence and comprehensibility; in oral tradition, repetition of the name serves as a memory support. The name, epithet, and suffixal form set a preliminary interpretive frame. The epithet “the Beautiful” forms an idealized image of the heroine, while evaluative formulas mark threat or merit. This function is especially important in fairy tales, where psychological descriptions are minimal and are replaced by signifying nominations. Repetition of names and formulas sustains fairy-tale rhythm and parallelisms, supports triple repetitions, and simplifies oral reproduction. Anthroponyms enter stable speech blocks (forms of address, recurring descriptions), ensuring formulaicity. They reflect ideas about social norms, family hierarchy, and values (beauty, wisdom, justice). Naming becomes part of the tradition’s cultural code and links the tale with collective memory.

The formulaic name “Marya Morevna” underscores the heroine’s exceptional nature: the given name combines with an unusual component, creating an epic effect and distance from everyday norms. The formula “Koschei the Deathless” fixes the semantics of invulnerability and threat, performing an evaluative-prognostic function: the addressee understands in advance that victory requires special knowledge. Within the text, stable nominations (“Ivan Sarevich,” “Marya Morevna,” “Koschei the Deathless”) form the plot’s “framework”: they are repeated at key points (abduction, search, liberation), supporting composition and an axiological opposition.

The epithet “the Beautiful” carries a normative positive evaluation that includes both outer beauty and inner “correctness” of behavior. Kinship nominations (“stepmother,” “stepdaughter”) immediately mark the moral scheme of the conflict and prepare the addressee for the heroine’s trial. The name formula in a fairy tale works as a “passport of virtue”: the heroine is not only beautiful; she demonstrates diligence and endurance, corresponding to the traditional ideal. Thus, anthroponymy becomes a mechanism for transmitting cultural norms through a brief formula.

The nomination “Sarevna” marks high status and in advance promises the revelation of the heroine’s true essence. The formula “Ivan Sarevich” establish the hero as the executor of the tsar’s will and a participant in trials. The two-plan naming (frog and tsarevna) functions as a compositional intrigue and strengthens the motif of a hidden identity. The formula “Ivan Sarevich” combines a folk given name with high status. The helper is designated as the “Grey Wolf”; although this is a zoonym, in the text it functions as an individualized stable “name” of an acting participant, receives lines of dialogue, and is establish as the hero’s permanent helper. Characters are often designated primarily by generic nominations (“old man,” “old woman,” “stepdaughter,” “daughter”), which reinforces typification. The name “Morozko” personifies and natural force and acts as a judge-tester, ensuring the moral resolution.

Here it is especially clear how nomination replaces portrait description: the listener understands whom to sympathize with and whom to condemn from the role itself. Moral evaluation is “embedded” in the naming system, and the final reward or punishment confirms its fairness. The formula “Finist –the Bright Falcon” gives the name symbolical depth: “bright falcon” denotes beauty and specialness. The repeatability of the formula performs a compositional function and fixes the ideal image of the hero, linking the anthroponym with a system of poetic symbols. Observations on the analyzed sub-corpus of Afanasyev’s wonder tales show that formulaic naming of two types dominates: (1) “name + status or epithet” (Ivan Sarevich, Vasilisa

the Beautiful) and (2) generic or kinship nominations (old man, old woman, stepmother, stepdaughter).

This relates to the genre task of rapid recognition. Formulas economize description and immediately set evaluation: epithet and status inform what kind of character we are dealing with and what to expect. Generic nominations, by contrast, increase the degree of typification and turn the character into a bearer of a social role. Individual names without attributes occur as a “core” that is then specified or expanded by a formula. Thus, the fairy tale prefers not the uniqueness of naming, but its functional transparency.

Conclusion

Anthroponyms in Russian folk tales form a system in which the name is a carrier of genre-significant meanings. The most productive are personal names, diminutive forms, status and kinship nominations, formulas of the type “name + epithet or status,” as well as evaluative nominations. Functionally, fairy-tale anthroponymy realizes identifying, characterological, evaluative, compositional, and cultural-marker functions. Formulaic naming ensures semantic compression and helps the addressee quickly recognize a character’s role in the plot scheme.

REFERENCES

1. Afanasyev, A. N. Narodnye russkie skazki [Russian Folk Tales]. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1982. 608 p.
2. Propp, V. Ya. Morfologiya skazki [Morphology of the Folktale]. 2nd ed. Moscow: Labirint, 1998. 512 p.
3. Meletinsky, E. M. Poetika mifa [Poetics of Myth]. Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura RAN, 1995. 408 p.
4. Superanskaya, A. V. Obshchaya teoriya imeni sobstvennogo [General Theory of the Proper Name]. Moscow: Nauka, 1973. 366 p.
5. Maslova, V. A. Lingvokulturologiya [Linguoculturology]. Moscow: Akademiya, 2001. 208 p.
6. Vinogradov, V. V. O yazyke khudozhestvennoy literatury [On the Language of Fiction]. Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1959. 656 p.