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ADDRESSING PEOPLE BY NAME IN RUSSIAN: A CORPUS STUDY

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

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A CORPUS STUDY[8]

In Russian, there are many ways to address a person by name. For instance, a man called *Aleksandr* may be addressed as *Aleksandr*, *Aleksandr Ivanovič*, *Saša*, *Sašen'ka*, *Saška*, *Sanja*, etc. This study aims at analyzing the use of various strategies of naming the listener throughout the last two centuries. It uses the data from the Russian National Corpus to establish the direction of change in address patterns and combines a statistical approach with a manual inspection of selected examples.

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1. Introduction

The use of Russian proper names in various communicative functions is a very intricate phenomenon. Native speakers of Russian skillfully use a variant form of the name that is appropriate for a situation, putting extremely subtle semantic differences into these variants. For instance, the same person may be called *Aleksandr*, *Aleksandr Ivanovič*, *Saša*, *Sašen'ka*, *Saška*, *Sanja*, etc., and the choice of each of these forms is determined by many factors. These factors include the social status of the speaker and the listener, the closeness of their relationship to each other , the status of surrounding persons, etc. Forms of address in Russian have been extensively studied (cf. Lagerberg et al., 2014 for a detailed literature review). This topic is not only of great theoretical importance for sociolinguistics, but it also plays an important role in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Textbooks of Russian contain recommendations regarding the situations in which this or that form of the names should be used, but such recommendations inevitably turn out to be incomplete.

For instance, Murray & Smith (2001, p. 1) identify the following forms of address in Russian and their conditions of use:

– Diminutive form (**Витя, Володя, Катя, Серёжа, Оля, …**) is used to address children and friends (from one's peer group). One would also use the pronoun **ты** with these groups of people.
– Long form (**Виталий, Владимир, Екатерина, Сергей, Ольга, …**) is rarely used and is one way in which foreigners can be identified.
– Long form and patronymic (**Виталий Максимович, Владимир Петрович, Екатерина Михайловна, …**) is used by younger people to address older or senior people whom they do not know very well or with whom they are on formal terms. <…>

It is evident that these recommendations are far from being complete. For instance, they do not give any idea as to how address a person of the same age whom one does not know very well. Another reason why these recommendations are incomplete is that the choice of forms of naming other people varies significantly over time. For instance, the speakers of Present-Day Russian would hardly identify a foreigner based on the use of a long form of the name; nowadays, it rather seems to be linked to formal interactions.

Significant material on the use of proper names was collected a questionnaire on family etiquette (Piperski et al., 2018), but it cannot be used as a reliable source of diachronic data: even if

we can assume that the differences between the respondents by age can be interpreted as manifestations of the sociolinguistic apparent time, these data still do not extend far enough to observe long-term changes. Therefore, we used the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru) in order to trace the variability of addressing people by name over the past two centuries.

However, it is hard to extract data for such a study from the RNC. Proper names are used in a variety of functions, such as addressing people, mentioning people, and (self-)presentation, and they are not annotated in the corpus. For this reason, we took two approaches to tackle this problem. One of them was to restrict the context in order to make it possible to obtain at least some reliable statistical data without noise, and the other involves a significant amount of manual annotation and a qualitative analysis.

2. Address by name: a statistical overview

In order to study forms of address by name over the last two centuries, we manually selected a sample of names including 10 female and 12 male names:

female: *Valentina, Vera, Galina, Elena, Irina, Marija, Natal'ja (Natalija), Nina, Ol'ga, Tat'jana*;

male: *Aleksandr, Aleksej, Andrej, Anton, Viktor, Vladimir, Dmitrij, Maksim, Mixail, Nikolaj, Sergej, Jurij.*

For these names, a list of diminutive forms was compiled based on (Superanskaya, 2005) and on our intuitions as native speakers. In total, this list includes 99 diminutive forms. For instance, *Aleksej* is represented by *Lëša*, *Alëša*, *Lëška*, *Alëška*, *Lëšen'ka*, *Alëšen'ka*, *Lëxa*. The list of diminutives can be expanded; however, in its present form it is sufficiently representative because it includes the most common forms of the names in our sample. One must also note that it is possible to distinguish between the primary short form (*Lëša* / *Alëša*) and secondary suffixal diminutives based on this form (*Alëška*, *Lëšen'ka*, etc.). However, this distinction will not be made in this paper.

We are interested in the use of three forms of address: diminutive; full name; full name + patronymic. These three forms of address can be used with singular (*Lëša, ty*) or with plural (*Lëša, vy*); for more detail on singular and plural in pronouns, verbs and adjectives in Russian, cf. (Betsch and Berger, 2009). This gives 3 × 2 = 6 possible options.

In order to extract these forms of address, we used the following queries:

1) any of the diminutives in the nominative singular after any punctuation mark and before a punctuation mark starting with a capital letter; *ty* / *tvoj* as the next word in any case form.

2) any of the diminutives in the nominative singular after any punctuation mark and before a punctuation mark starting with a capital letter; *vy* / *vaš* as the next word in any case form.

3) any of the full names in the nominative singular after any punctuation mark and before a punctuation mark starting with a capital letter; *ty* / *tvoj* as the next word in any case form.

4) any of the full names in the nominative singular after any punctuation mark and before a punctuation mark starting with a capital letter; *vy* / *vaš* as the next word in any case form.

5) any of the full names in the nominative singular after any punctuation mark starting with a capital letter; any patronymic before a punctuation mark; *ty* / *tvoj* as the next word in any case form;

6) any of the full names in the nominative singular after any punctuation mark starting with a capital letter; any patronymic before a punctuation mark; *vy* / *vaš* as the next word in any case form.

The time period between 1801 and 2016 was split into 5-year-spans (1801–1805, 1806–1810, …, 2011–2015, 2016). For instance, query 3 (full name + singular) returned the following four results for 1931–1935:

(1) Я даже боялся, что в случае неудачи ребята выпроводят сватов без особенных почестей. — **Ольга, ты** пойдешь к попам? — опросил Колька. — Ты что? [А. С. Макаренко. Педагогическая поэма. Часть 2 (1934)]

(2) Въ дверяхъ появляется внезапно его жена. — **Николай, ты** опоздаешь, уже шесть. — Съ козломъ? — испуганно спрашиваетъ ее. [На нашей Родинѣ (по совѣтской печати) // Вѣстникъ Общества Галлиполійцевъ № 12, 1934]

(3) Мать моя зашла ко мне и спросила: — Что с тобою, **Максим, ты** сам на себя не похож? Я сказал: — Это от жары, день был ужасно жаркий. [А. И. Куприн. Ночная фиалка (1933)]

(4) Я трачу попусту время и деньги, — выдержанно, но уже с легким огорчением сказал он, не меняя фронтальную установку головы. — **Николай, ты** хитришь, ты и сейчас скользнул глазами на мою соседку! Пойдем! — она взяла за руку мужа и повела на площадку, чтоб сойти на первой остановке. [К. С. Петров-Водкин. Моя повесть. Часть 2. Пространство Эвклида (1932)]

For each 5-year span, we counted the number of documents with each form of address. The totals for the six forms of address is given in Table 1:

Tab. 1. Forms of address (document counts)

	sg	pl
Diminutive	507	138
Full name	198	85
Full name + patronymic	50	411

As expected, full name + patronymic is most frequently combined with the plural, whereas diminutives are used with the singular. Full names are used with the singular twice as oten as with the plural.

Summing the six counts for each time span and dividing the values by the total, we calculated the proportion of cases where a given form of address is used. The results are summarized in Figures 1 to3 (sliding average across three adjacent 5-year spans):
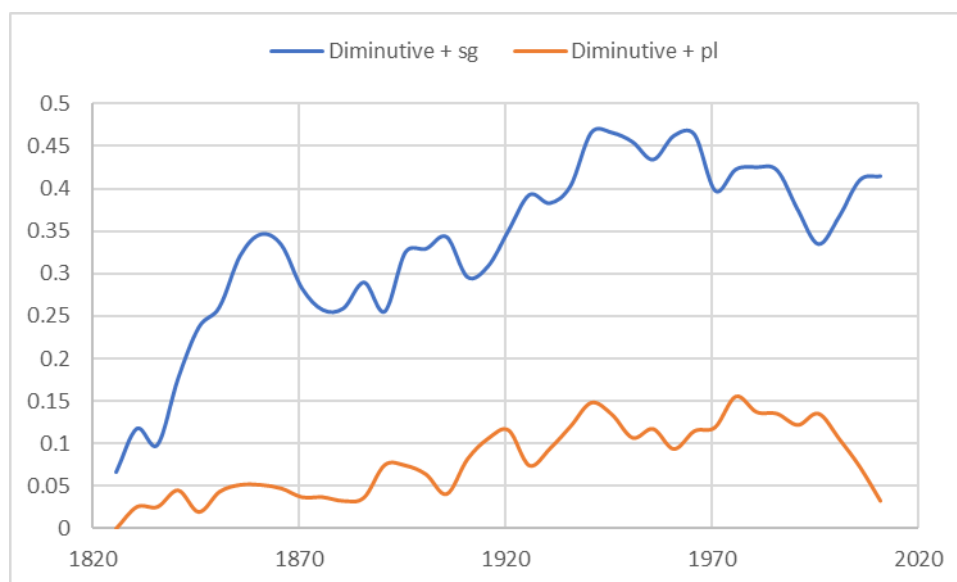

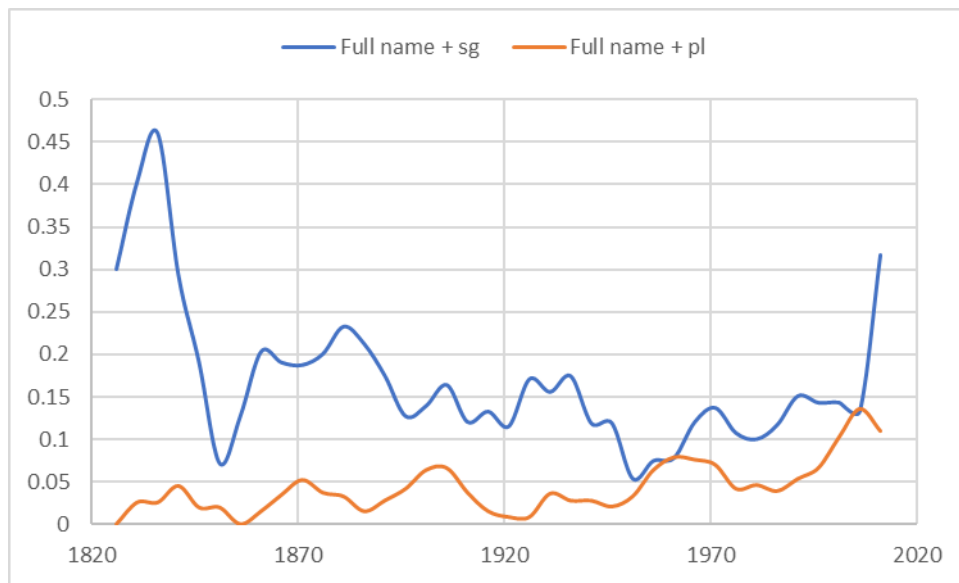Fig. 1. Diminutive + singular / plural
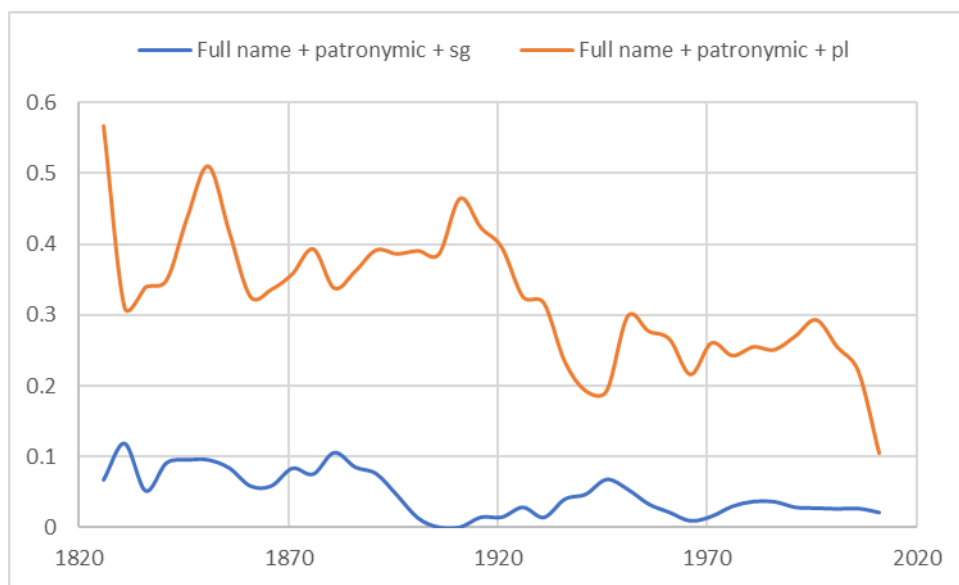
Fig. 2. Full name + singular / plural

Fig. 3. Full name + patronymic + singular / plural

These figures show that the use of full name + patronymic (Figure 3) has been declining, and in the least decade the decline has been quite steep. This form of address was very common in the 19th century, where it could combine both with the singular and the plural, but in the last 50 years singular can be encountered only in exceptional cases. On the contrary, the use of full names has been on the rise (Figure 2). Diminutive + singular remains the most popular form (Figure 1), but it is worth noting that it became so popular only in the mid-19th century. Obviously, these results might have been influenced by some confounding factors, such as the genres of the texts in the RNC of the popularity

of individual names (e.g., *Anton* and *Maksim* lack diminutives forms that are not perceived as too informal or intimate, and the rise in the popularity of these names might have also influenced the rise in the use of full name + singular and full name + plural). However, the sheer amount of data makes the results trustworthy in general.

3. Forms of address over time: two case studies

In order to compare two synchronic systems of the forms of address, we selected two years separated by 140 years, namely 1865 and 2005. For 1865, the number of texts was too small, so that we also included texts from 1864 into considerations. Some tentative observations are given in the following two subsections.

3.1. 1864–1865

Full names were used more frequently than diminutive forms of the names (1355 hits vs. 852 hits, respectively). In more than half of the cases (758 out of 1355), they were followed by a patronymic. Patronymics are often spelt in a way that reflects reduction (*Stepanyč* instead of *Stepanovič*, *Ivanyč* instead of *Ivanovič*, etc.). Such examples amount to 4% of the patronymics (33 out of 758), cf. (5):

> (5) — Да что тут и говорить! Вот сейчас, вот первое дело, благослови Господи, муж твой наедет, а ты, **Сергей Филипыч**, и ступай прочь, отправляйся на задний двор к музыкантам и смотри из-под сарая, как у Катерины Ильвовны в спальне свеченька горит, да как она пуховую постельку перебивает, да с своим законным Зиновием с Борисычем опочивать укладывается. [Н. С. Лесков. Леди Макбет Мценского уезда (1865)]

The use of a full patronymic is probable more typical for upper-class speakers and formal situations, whereas a contracted form indicates either a low social status of the speaker or the informal nature of the situation.

Occasionally, diminutive can be found in the data, e.g., *Mašen'ka*, *Vanička*, *Nikolen'ka*. However, they were most frequently used to describe children rather than as forms of address:

> (6) — ... самый близкий для нее вопрос — телесное и душевное здравие ее Ванички, ее Машеньки. [В. П. Авенариус. Бродящие силы. Современная идиллия (1865)]
> (7) — эти запасы по отдельным ящичкам разложены: это для Машеньки, а это для Николеньки… [В. А. Слепцов. Трудное время (1865)]

However, sometimes they were also used to address adults in order to emphasize intimacy with the interlocutor.

Sometimes before or after a name a noun or an adjective was added. Such nouns as *batjuška* 'father', *drug* 'friend', *dušečka* 'my soul', *golubčik* 'my pigeon' were used in order to make the appeal to the interlocutor more affectionate and caring. Some adjectives, e.g., *počtennejšij* 'most venerable', were added to a name to show respect for the interlocutor.

(8) Саша, дружочек, понесите, пожалуйста, вы мою Матузалевну. [Н. С. Лесков. Некуда (1864)]

(9) [Луша, жен] Голубчик, Сергей Ильич, делайте со мною, что хотите, только, ради Бога, возьмите меня отсюда. [И. Ф. Горбунов. Самодур. Картины из купеческой жизни (1864)]

(10) — Душечка, Оленька, скажите мне, ради бога, отвечать ли мне Аркадию [Г. И. Успенский. Из цикла «Сторона наша убогая» (1865)]

(11) — А тебе, Маша, весело? — Маша, милая, спроси у солдата, есть ли на этапе водка? [А. Ф. Писемский. Русские лгуны (1865)]

(12) «Все вздор, моя милая Машенька... [А. Ф. Писемский. Русские лгуны (1865)]

(13) — Не знаю, как тебе, друг Саша [В. П. Авенариус. Бродящие силы. Современная идиллия (1865)]

(14) Мне, батюшка Алексей Феофилактыч [А. Ф. Писемский. Русские лгуны (1865)

(15) — Маша! Что ты говоришь? Друг мой! [В. А. Слепцов. Трудное время (1865)]

(16) Почтеннейший Андрей Александрович! [А. Ф. Писемский. Письмо А. А. Краевскому (1864)]

For lower social classes, the use of expressive short forms of names with the addition of suffixes like *-ka* (*Miška*) or *-juxa* (*Andrjuxa*) was typical. Sometimes these names were used together with a nickname , e.g. *Miška Razlomaj* 'Mishka Break-It-Over'). Such sentences were characterized by the use of slang or substandard forms.

(17) — Машка… Что это за телячьи нежности… [В. В. Крестовский. Петербургские трущобы. Книга о сытых и голодных. Части 1-7]

(18) — Ну, Андрюха, прилаживай чертохвост, прилаживай доски-ту! Что осовемши сидишь, словно тетерев какой? Работа ништо себе, веселая. [В. В. Крестовский. Петербургские трущобы. Книга о сытых и голодных. Ч. 4]

(19)   Проюрдонил! — Мишка Разломай! Водки да табаку давай сюда, псира! * * Собака (жарг.). [В. В. Крестовский. Петербургские трущобы. Книга о сытых и голодных. Ч. 4]

3.2. 2005

In modern literature, a wide range of different forms of names is used. In the 1800s there was no such diversity: in most cases full names or their short forms were used. At present, it is possible to observe in the same text the use of full names, with or without a patronymic or a last name, their short variants, various diminutive forms, many of them with the suffixes like *-ka*, *-juxa*, *-jan*, etc.

The context of the use of names has also changed. The use of a full name, especially with a patronymic, implies respect for the interlocutor. However, from time to time it can be used in emotional, even aggressive context with the aim to insult a person:

(20)   — Ты что, Елена, сдурела?! [Нонна Мордюкова «Казачка»]

(21)   — Юрий Юрьевич! У тебя все в порядке с головой?! [Елена Топильская. Помни о смерти (memento mori)]

As in earlier times, nowadays, when using various diminutive forms, the interlocutors express concern for each other. Affectionate appeals to children are also widespread.

(22)   — Пойдем, Коленька, сынок, домой! — она потащила мальчика за руку. [Дмитрий Глуховский. Метро 2033]

(23)   — Ты почему спать не идешь, Юрочка? — Тебе… уже легче там, Юрочка? Юра понимал, о чем она хочет спросить и не решается. — Понятно тебе? Побереги силы, Юрочка. [Анна Берсенева. Возраст третьей любви]

Sometimes the use of the diminutive form of the name when referring to the interlocutor is accompanied by the diminutive form of other words in a neighboring sentence.

(24)   — Танечка! Посиди у телевизора. Мы скоренько придем… [Нонна Мордюкова «Казачка»]

The diminutive form is also used in cases where the goal is to calm or reassure the interlocutor.

(25)　　　　— Ничего, Андрюша, пробьемся, — сказал он, обращаясь не столько к Андрею, сколько к самому себе. — Андрюша, теперь налево, смелей, смелей налево! И прямо! [Виктор Пронин. Банда 8]

(26)　　　　— Верь в них, Андрюша, и успокойся! У нас в кармане — два лимона! [Андрей Рубанов. Сажайте, и вырастет]

When using diminutives, additional words with a positive connotation (*sladkij* 'sweet', *milyj* 'nice') or possessive pronouns (*my* 'мой') may be added.

(27)　　　　Милая Лена, ты просила, чтобы я не отстал от автобуса! [Сергей Носов. Грачи улетели]

(28)　　　　У самовара я и моя Маша, а на дворе уже совсем темно… [Анатолий Приставкин. Вагончик мой дальний]

Names with the suffix *-ka* can be used in order to address a person one wants to scold or to put in a bad light, or simply to show a negative attitude towards the actions of a person. This can even occur outside the form of address, as in (31):

(29)　　　　— Брось, Верка, — осерчала на нее толстуха, — о покойниках плохо не говорят. [Татьяна Сахарова. Добрая фея с острыми зубками]

(30)　　　　— Колька! Я тебе что сказала? Будешь плохо себя вести — за тобой бесы из туннелей придут! Вот Сашка твой мамку свою не слушался — его и забрали! [Дмитрий Глуховский. Метро 2033]

(31)　　　　— А Кошевая Ленка, как с мужем разошлась, так сделалась общественницей — А Ленка Кошевая сама сдала дом немцам, понимаете, сама! [Нонна Мордюкова «Казачка»]

-ka may also appear when an experienced interlocutor addresses an unexperienced one in order to give them advice:

(32)　　　　— Слава богу, Машка, умница, мне сказала… — Ну что ж она, совсем, что ли, глупая… [Александр Гаррос, Алексей Евдокимов. Новая жизнь. Святочная повесть]

(33)　　　　— Есть такие люди, Машка, которым очень плохо, когда другому хорошо. [Александр Гаррос, Алексей Евдокимов. Новая жизнь. Святочная повесть]

(34)　　　　— Машка, в чем ты ходишь?! Купи ты себе нормальную шубу или дубленку! [Елена Топильская. Помни о смерти]

4. Further directions of study

Obviously, there are many more interesting problems linked to the use of Russian names for addressing people. For instance, we have not even touched upon the fact that a name may combine with a surname, and such a combination may include either a full name, or a diminutive name (both the primary short name and a suffixed derivative). An interesting example comes form Arkady Gaidar's *Timur i ego komanda* ("Timur and his squad", 1940):

(35)   — На горизонте показался Мишка Квакин! [Аркадий Гайдар. Тимур и его команда (1940)]

(36)   — Мишка! — оборачиваясь, заорал он. — Брось карты, тут к тебе какая-то церемония пришла! [Аркадий Гайдар. Тимур и его команда (1940)]

(37)   Работы на сегодня было еще немало, но, главное, сейчас надо было составить и отослать Мишке Квакину ультиматум. [Аркадий Гайдар. Тимур и его команда (1940)]

(38)   — Скажет сто слов, а можно бы четыре. Труби, Николай, вот и ограда. — Подавай наверх Михаила Квакина! — приказал Гейка высунувшемуся сверху мальчишке.

(39)   Вас зовут Михаил Квакин. Не так ли?

(40)   Он разорвал пакет, и, не слезая с ограды, стал читать: — «Атаману шайки по очистке чужих садов Михаилу Квакину…»

It is worth noting that the full name *Mixail* is used with surname only, whereas the short name may be used without a surname and is more likely to serve as a form of address.

Attention must also be drawn to the jocular uses of full name + patronymic, as in the subsequent examples. It would be worthwhile to distinguish such cases from the "proper" use of full name + patronymic.

(41)   Татьяна Федоровна? Это вас Алексей Евгеньевич беспокоит… Ну почему сразу — дурак? … Я только спросить хотел — ты меня сегодня ночевать возьмешь?" [Михаил Бару. Записки понаехавшего (2010)]

(42)   — Зови меня просто, по-дружески: Николай Иванович. Николай Иванович Бирюков. — А ты в каком классе? — В четвертом, — ответил дылда. — В четвертый перешел. Тогда меня нисколько не удивило, не озадачило, не рассмешило то, что дылда, величавший себя Николаем Ивановичем, всего-навсего, оказывается, перешел в четвертый класс и был, таким образом, лишь тремя годами старше меня. [Александр Рекемчук. Мальчики // «Юность» (1970)]

Words accompanying forms of address are also worth studying. For instance, one might study the use of full names and diminutives after words like *tëtja* 'aunt' and *djadja* 'uncle':

(43)   «Это чушь, тетя Маша, чушь! У нас просто нет денег». [Лидия Каледа. Воспоминания об отце — священнике Владимире Амбарцумове // «Альфа и Омега» (2000)]

(44)   — Тетя Ниночка, если мне позвонят, вам не трудно будет меня подозвать? [Татьяна Моспан. Подиум (2000)]

5. Conclusion

The use of personal names for addressing people in Russian is very diverse, and, even more importantly, it has been changing over time. In our paper, we have presented the results of a corpus study of various strategies of using proper names used to address people; we have confirmed the widespread intuition that the use of patronymics has been declining in the recent decades. We have also made a preliminary attempt at a qualitative analysis of two synchronic systems (1865 and 2005) before proceeding to discuss some further directions of study where Russian National Corpus might turn out to be a useful source of information about addressing people in Russian.

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