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Nicknaming Practices in Families

A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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This chapter analyzes the role played by nicknaming practices in the interactions of family members from a cross-cultural perspective. The analysis is based on observed instances of nickname use as derived from audio and videotaped dinners in Israeli and Jewish American families and on self-report data derived from open-structured interviews. Considerable cultural variability has been found with respect to the traffic of nicknames within and across family boundaries. A typology of the functions of nicknames as used in familial contexts is presented, and the sociocultural implications of differences in patterns of nickname use and in attitudes toward nicknames among the Israeli families as compared with the American Jewish families are discussed.

"From the day I sat down beside him at school, I was unaware that he had any other name. The crab—that was his name, and that was the nickname he had carried with him, he claimed, from the village. Not so his parents. They said that it was actually in the city that the nickname had been pinned on him. The truth is that childhood nicknames are like jokes, nobody knows their source, or who invented them. And they stick. It was more my own anxiety than his worry. I was following the phenomenon with great interest. . . .

"At first I thought that the nickname "crab" was given to him because of his appearance. His manner of walking was strange, the right leg pointing to the right and the left leg to the left, like the needle of a compass. Add to this his slimness, tallness and long neck—and you will need no more information about the source of his nickname.

"But that was not the case. When I became enamored with fishing, and came to know the characteristics of the sea-crab intimately, as intimately as a man knows his own secret, I was reminded of my friend

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Hariz Ibn-Makitz, may his soul rest in peace, and realized that I had been wrong after all. Only then did I grasp that nicknames are related to the person's inner essence and not to his external appearance.

"There is something utterly mysterious about nicknames.

"And he, may his memory be blessed, resembled the sea-crab in his naivete and goodness of heart. An unmatched naivete. If the Arabs were a people of the beaches, they would probably have used the crab in their fables in place of the ostrich." (E. Habibi, "The Crab's Lament," 1988)[1]

The fascination with nicknaming practices, and the curiosity about the roles they play in social life, is shared by many users of language, and students of verbal behavior have provided considerable systematic insights into the forms and uses of nicknames. The study of nicknames has, indeed, attracted researchers from a range of scholarly disciplines, each of whom has tried to dispel some of the "mystery" associated with this linguistic practice. Sociolinguists have considered nicknames as part of the study of systems of personal address (see Philipsen & Huspek, 1985, for an extensive bibliography). Anthropologists have traditionally been interested in nicknaming practices as part of the study of the kinship terminologies and the social organization of the communities in which they have situated their inquiries (e.g., Antoun, 1968; Barrett, 1978; Brandes, 1975; Gilmore, 1982; Glazier, 1987; Manning, 1974). Folklorists have similarly explored the nature of nicknames as folk expressions (e.g., McDowell, 1981), and social psychologists have attended to their uses as observable mechanisms of group life (e.g., Morgan, O'Neill, & Harre, 1979). All these studies bring out the essentially group-related nature of the use of nicknames in everyday interaction, especially their grounding in small face-to-face primary group relations.

Moreover, as Glazier (1987) points out, in a study of an American Jewish community in the Midwest, cultural changes in social organization and kinship relations in modern urban settings can be reflected in shifting patterns of nickname use. Indeed, nicknames can be seen as symbols of both relationship and community, and their study can, therefore, offer insights both into patterns of cultural practice and into processes of cultural change.

Thus, drawing on the insights offered by these various studies, this chapter will add to the growing fund of research on nicknaming patterns by investigating their functions in the context of nuclear families in two modern, complex societies (Israel and the United States). We hope that both the focus on the modern, middle-class nuclear family as a social unit vis-à-vis nickname use and the attempt to develop a comparative,

cross-cultural perspective for exploring this widespread and intriguing sociolinguistic mechanism will contribute to the understanding of nicknaming practices as an instance of the interaction of language and social life.

In his semiotically oriented analysis of nickname use, McDowell (1981, p. 5) has identified three questions that need to be asked with regard to each appellation unit:

(1) What is the scope of name use?
(2) What, if any, is the sense of the names employed in this unit?
(3) How do these names become associated with their name bearers?

THE NICKNAMING QUESTIONS

(1) What is the scope of name use? An answer to this would sketch the name's sociological boundaries, delineating the social categories, or persons, favorable to it and those that constrain it. We have restricted our attention to nicknaming practices within nuclear families. Whether the family group is the proper scope for nicknames, evincing patterns of use that are distinctive to it, is an empirical question that a study such as ours should address rather than presuppose. The answer, as we shall see, is not a simple one.

While nicknames do indeed tend to proliferate in some of the nuclear families in our study, and are perceived as restricted to them, they are uncommon in other cases or take the wider social network as their scope. At the same time, there is considerable evidence of internal differentiation in family groups with respect to nickname use, which may be constrained rather than facilitated by the presence of some family members. Examples of family coalitions sociolinguistically marked by the use of nicknames can serve both integrating and differentiating functions within nuclear families. Thus family coalitions, which are sociolinguistically marked by the use of nicknames, can serve as linguistic mechanisms of social demarcation, integrating the family both by preventing the spread of certain nicknames outside the family group and by keeping other nicknames from penetrating into the family circle.

(2) What, if any, is the sense of the names employed in this unit? Because a nickname does not only refer, as all names do, but also conveys a great deal of information, an answer to this question would address the degree of descriptive backing the nickname makes manifest and the character of the information it conveys. When the descriptive backing is central to a nickname (which is not always the case, as in nicknames formed by morphological inflections on the official name), its sense must still be inferred. As McDowell (1981, p. 7) puts it: "The special province of the nickname is to make manifest an unorthodox descriptive backing." Because nicknames tend to convey their descriptive backing through indirect, metaphorical means—whether a person's nickname refers, for example, to some aspect of his or her external appearance, or to some character trait, or harks back to some childhood incident—its meaning is often left open to conjecture and may, indeed, change over the years for some of its users (as is indicated in the case of "the crab" in our epigraph).

Getting the "sense" of a nickname of this kind is very much like understanding a metaphor: the process involves establishing a cognitive link between the nickname bearer and some extraneous semantic domain in such a way as to highlight the properties of both. The nicknames that proliferate within the families we studied quite often lack such descriptive backing, as they are formed by morphological inflections on the official name. Yet, when they do carry information, it is of the kind that is deeply embedded in family history, and the retelling of the particular incident or trait that triggered the nickname reinforces part of a family's shared and bonding canonical repertoire.

(3) How do these names become associated with their name bearers? An answer to this question involves attention to the inventive, metaphorical powers of language as it performs the function of nomination. Nicknames, unlike official names, are not associated with institutionalized moments and conditions of performative nomination. That is, with a speech act that establishes a naming convention predicated on the power of language to transform, not merely depict, reality. Given the absence of an institutional procedure for accomplishing performative nomination in the case of nicknames, they earn their way into general usage by virtue of a combination of semantic appropriateness and aesthetic appeal. Nicknames are often tied to narrative anecdotes that rationalize, even legitimize, particular names. These tales, as McDowell (1981, p. 10) suggests, "substitute, in some acts of didactic nomination, for the missing act of performative nomination." It is because of this informal manner of nickname emergence that a particular nickname may be associated with conflicting "miniature etiological tales" concerning their source, as seems to have been the case with "the crab" mentioned above.

We must note, however, that formulating our task as the investigation of the uses of nicknames in families seems more straightforward

than it actually is. Although the definition of a nickname as consisting of a name other than the "official name" is generally accepted, it implies an overly simplified dichotomy between the official name and the nickname. The dichotomy blurs the fact that nicknames are not all of a piece, and their uses reflect various degrees of institutionalization and routinization that underlie the degree of linguistic "markedness" that the various forms are felt to have in different contexts. Naming practices should, therefore, be placed along a continuum rather than be described in polar terms. Nicknames conventionally derived from given names (e.g., Debra from Deborah) turn within families into institutionalized replacements. These are usually the only appellations used, so much so that they are no longer perceived as falling under the category of "nicknames." In these cases, the official name is used so rarely as to make its utterance a sociolinguistically marked occasion.

Attention to these processes of gradual and differential institutionalization of nicknames—from "fresh," creative nicknames to routinized, standardized ones—is essential. Its merit lies in that it forces us away from the easier (and less interesting) task of considering nicknames as linguistic "products" to the more difficult (but more rewarding) task of exploring their uses with reference to the ongoing transactional web that makes for their gradual, differential adoption.

The comparative account of nicknaming practices within Israeli Jewish families and Jewish American ones undertaken here offers a functional analysis of nickname use in family discourse, whether the nicknames are used to perform a vocative or a referential semantic function (i.e., whether they are used in address or in mention). Within this context, we shall address the issue of scope, sense, nomination, and institutionalization in nickname usage. We thus hope to show that nicknaming practices constitute a significant component of cultural style for members of the two speech communities in question. Also a better understanding of the ways they are deployed can lead to a better grasp of conceptions of the family as a sociocultural unit in the two groups.

We now turn to a description of our data collection procedures and briefly address the question of the salience and scope of nickname use in both cultural groups. We then move on to develop a typology of nicknaming functions, which will incorporate a consideration of their semantics as vocatives and referential signs. Finally, we will discuss the sociocultural implications of our comparative findings, particularly in terms of what they tell us about families in the cultural groups studied.

NICKNAMING PRACTICES IN ISRAELI AND JEWISH AMERICAN FAMILIES

Our data are derived from an examination of naming practices in family discourse in the dinner-table conversations of Israeli families, Jewish American families, and American Israeli immigrant families in Israel (12 in the United States and 23 in Israel). The families studied are all middle- to upper-middle-class Jewish families, with two to three school-age children. Three dinner-table conversations were recorded (one by video and two by audio) for each family, with an observer present at each dinner. Transcripts were coded for all instances of children being addressed by the parents, yielding a corpus of 887 vocatives. These were classified as follows: (a) the use of a name or an institutionalized nickname ("Stephen" or "Steve"), (b) the use of an innovative, individuated nickname (including morphological and phonological variations on the name, and (c) an endearment ("honey," "darling"; Sheffer, 1989). These data are complemented by insights gained during semistructured interviews with all the families in the project, in the course of which we asked family members to chart a "nicknaming map" (who addressed and refers to whom by which name or nickname) and discussed in depth the attitudes and narratives connected with specific naming practices.

In these conversations, it is Israeli parents who indulge in an extremely rich repertoire of nicknaming toward their children. Given the choices between using a name (or its institutionalized abbreviated version), a nickname, or a term of endearment, Israeli parents prefer nicknames in more than a third of the cases, while both Jewish American and immigrant parents revert to nicknames in fewer than 10% of the cases (Table 4.1). In the overwhelming majority of cases, Jewish American or immigrant parents address children by name or by terms of endearment, nicknaming being used in only 15% of all explicit instances of address.

Israeli parents use a wide variety of innovative nicknames, yielding a rich repertoire of emotively colored terms of address per child at every meal. Parents indulge in an extremely rich repertoire of nicknaming toward children of all ages (the use of eight to nine such appellations during dinner is not unusual). Linguistically, these nicknames usually take the form of morphological play on the child's official name (e.g., Dan/Danny/Danile/Danilus/Dudu, and so on). For example, a child named Jonathan, who was 10 at the time of the recordings, was variously addressed by his parents as [jonatan]/[joni]/[onton]/[jonti], and [ontik]. Such effusive nicknaming practices are rare in our Jewish

TABLE 4.1 Parents' Terms of Address to Children in Three Family Groups

	Israeli (percentage)	*Immigrant (percentage)*	*Jewish American (percentage)*
Name	55	88	85
Nickname	37	10	7.5
Endearment	8	2	7.5
N	(436)	(188)	(263)

American and immigrant samples: At the dinner table, children are usually addressed by their names or by their institutionalized nicknames, occasionally interchanged with a conventional form of endearment. Thus a girl named Jennifer, aged 8, is addressed either as "Jennifer," "Jenny," or "darling." Clearly, the Israeli nicknaming pattern in this context differs considerably from the Jewish American one.

Is the effusive use of nicknaming in the Israeli families related to children's age? Do younger children in these families receive more nicknames than older ones? As can be seen in Table 4.2, the younger the Israeli child, the lower are his or her chances of being addressed by his or her official name. In this group, the use of nicknames decreases with age. We found no such trend in the Jewish American and immigrant families: The relatively small number of nicknaming vocatives (20 cases for each group compared with 163 for the Israeli families) are equally distributed by age in the Jewish American families and tend to be reserved for preschoolers and teens in the immigrant families.

The two cultural nicknaming patterns that emerge differ both in practice (from abundant use of nicknames to an almost complete avoidance of them) as well as in attitude toward the practice (from highly positive to highly critical). The attitudinal range was clearly verbalized during the interviews with the families. In the Israeli families, questions regarding nicknames were met with general, positive excitement, with all members of the family joining in to provide the full list and intercept with stories. In the Jewish American and immigrant families, nicknames were far from being considered a positive family asset. On the contrary, they were sometimes frowned upon and considered a practice that undermines a person's claim to individuality ("Actually I don't like nicknames and I always call the kids by their regular names, you know, their given names"). Yet, institutionalized nicknames (Jenny for Jennifer, Bobbie for Robert) are just as common in use in the Jewish American and immigrant families as in the Israeli ones, and narrative

TABLE 4.2 Proportion of Nicknames in Parents' Address to Children According to Age

	Israeli (percentage)	*Immigrant (percentage)*	*Jewish American (percentage)*
Preschoolers	100	20	33
School aged	88	8	33
Teens	50	25	29
N	(163)	(20)	(20)

anecdotes associated with familial nicknames were provided by family members in both groups. Hence, before we can explore the meaning of the sociocultural variation found in use and attitude, we need to delineate the functions nicknames can serve in the familial setting.

A FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF NICKNAMES

In this section, we delineate the major communicative functions served by the nicknaming practices we have studied among middle-class Israeli and Jewish American families. Notably, the use of a particular nickname often serves more than one function in a given context—indeed, some of them are interdependent—but the various functions we specify can, nevertheless, be analytically distinguished. The advantage of distinguishing between the functions of nicknames in a systematic and schematic fashion is that this enables us to identify dominant functions of nicknames in given contexts and compare them across contexts and cultures. Some of the functions of nicknames we discuss are relevant to the analysis of nicknames in the aforementioned traditional anthropological studies.

The fact that comparable functions of nicknames within nuclear families in urban settings can be demonstrated is not self-evident, given the view that "in the relatively impersonal milieu of the large city, nicknames can have no significant impact; the anonymity of urban life prevents nicknames from operating as a check on behavior" (Brandes 1975, p. 146). Glazier (1987, p. 85) questions Brandes's conclusion and argues that "nicknames occur in cities and manifest characteristics deviating from what they are in European or Latin American villages," offering an intriguing analysis of the functions of nicknames as the vehicles of nostalgia and as emblems of a vanished community.

However, even in confirming the contemporary interest in nicknames as a phenomenon associated with urban life, and adding an identity-related function that is relevant to the sociocultural condition of the group he has studied, Glazier considers nickname use in public, and in male rather than domestic and familial contexts. In fact, he describes the antagonism middle-aged women feel toward the men's continued cultivation of their youthful nicknaming practices. As we consider familial exchanges, we will attend to the particularized ways that familiar functions of nicknames are used in this context.

Nicknames Can Perform an Individuating Function

Nicknames were found to serve the purpose of ready identification in communities whose naming repertoires consisted of a small number of surnames and rigid naming requirements that led to the frequent replication of names among kin or even nonkin (e.g., Antoun, 1968; Dorian, 1970; Brandes, 1975). In families, the individuating function of nicknames is more subtle and is not motivated by the requirement for simple identification. It may, however, be a token of attention to individual characteristics at a certain age, or to personalized occasions or circumstances.

In one of the Jewish American families, the younger boy was referred to for years as "Dan the wrecker," an appellation obviously recalling certain types of sanctioned behavior. In another, a girl (called Ruth, officially) acquired "Zelda" as a nickname due to a part she played in a school performance, an occasion cherished and remembered only by her family. It is interesting that it is members' joint awareness of the tale connected with the nickname, rather than the nickname itself, that generates a sense of solidarity.

Nicknames Can Perform a Social Demarcation Function

In this respect, they function like slang, as linguistic mechanisms of social demarcation. Because the descriptive backing of the nicknames generally refers to personal characteristics made manifest in face-to-face communication, such descriptors of personal appearance, social behavior, and personal habits of various kinds are the stuff of which nicknames are made. Their crystallization as part of the familial code both reflects and reinforces the existence and the continued cultivation of a shared family history, sketching the boundaries of the family as a social unit and enhancing a sense of solidarity among its members.

The same is true for the use of nicknames constructed through morphological play with the official name by means of addition or

deletion of suffixes or infixes of various sorts. The nickname's integrative function is particularly pronounced when members consciously prevent their spread outside the scope of the family. As we were told by a girl called Noa, aged 18 at the time of the interview, the addition of the suffix "le" to her name (Noale) made it a nickname only her family had the right to use: "If my friends tried to call me [Noale] I wouldn't let them, I would say it's a reserved name [shem shamur]."

Another, perhaps subtler way in which nicknames are used to demarcate the family unit is through a process of abstention. For example, a child may obtain a nickname in a peer group, and his or her family may be quite aware of this nickname, yet they will never use it in addressing the child. Thus, for reasons long forgotten, a boy called Ilan has acquired the nickname of Benson; he is both Benson and Ilan to his friends but never Benson to his family. The mirror image of this process is gleaned from the words of the parents who said they abstained from addressing a child with many familial nicknames by anything other than his or her official name in front of the child's friends. Such parental abstention testifies to the symbolic role nicknames play in demarcating social boundaries.

Another example of the demarcation of nicknames along generational lines involves the differential use of nicknames by members of different generations. For example, in one of our Israeli Jewish families, a 15-year-old boy, whose name is Avraham, is addressed by everyone except his grandmother as Rami. His grandmother calls him "Avremele," a choice of nickname that testifies to a loyalty to the Jewish origins of the name, with the diminutive "le" pointing more specifically to an Eastern European, Yiddish-speaking tradition. The institutionalized nickname Rami does not bear clear traces of the original but assimilates in its sound pattern to other popular Israeli nicknames (Tami for Tamar; Gabi for Gabriel; Nati for Netanel, and so on). In this case, the generation gap reflected through the choice of nicknames is also a gap between two subcultures that coexist in contemporary Israel: The Jewish, Yiddish-colored culture of the East European heritage and the native, Hebrew-based culture of modern Israel.

It is interesting that, to hear the voice of the Eastern European Yiddish-colored cultural style (the background of all our families) in the Jewish American families, interviewees had to go back one generational step. It was the father in the family, not a child, who recalled his grandmother calling him by the Yiddish variation of his Hebrew name in his childhood: "She used to call me 'Gershi', you know, from 'Gershon.' " Another parent recalled the Russian sounding nicknames her grandmother used in addressing her: "She said things like [glansh]/

[glanchik]/[glanshuk]/, I can't even pronounce it anymore." For their own children, though, these parents sometimes revert to the child's Hebrew name (Shalva for a child called Jessica) and use that as a nickname, drawing on Jewish heritage for demarcating the family unit.

Generally speaking, then, the Israeli Jewish families seem to rely most heavily on nicknaming practices for demarcating the family unit, for drawing the boundaries between the inner, private familial circle and society at large, between the private and the public. This integrative function of nicknames in Israeli society was stressed by interviewees who specified the constraints related to the use of nicknames outside the family boundaries, "when strangers are around." Especially outspoken on this issue were (it is not surprising) the teenagers who used the interviews to voice a complaint against their parents' occasional lapse into nicknaming in the presence of "others." Yet most parents are aware of the necessity to draw the lines: A child named Dan is called Dan at school because his parents made a special point of keeping the official version of the name (not reverting to the usual "dani"). But at home his mother addresses him alternatively as [dudi]/[benush] (from "ben" meaning "son") and [dedi]; yet not in front of others: "I am aware it is embarassing for him. In front of friends I always call him 'Dan.' "

In the talk of the North American families, the naming practices employed are in greater accord with wider societal usage, primarily signifying membership in the community at large and not in the family circle as such. Thus the private/public distinction of the Israeli families is replaced by an informal/formal distinction in the North American families: "I am not crazy about being called around the house Rebecca—if it's a wedding, a dinner-party, yeah, but around the house I prefer Becky from family and friends." But note that both appellations are drawn from the general societal repertoire; their use is distinguished by the degree of situational formality: One type of appellation is appropriate for formal occasions at home (dinner parties) as well as elsewhere (weddings), the other for informal talks with family and friends.

Nicknames Can Perform a Social Control Function

In the broadest sense, the function of social control performed by the use of a nickname is not different in essence from the social power encoded in choice of address terms in general. Though the emphasis in the literature traditionally has been on the ways in which choice of address terms maps onto social relations of power and solidarity in the

society at large (e.g., Brown & Gilman, 1960; Ervin-Tripp, 1972), sociolinguists have also been aware of the power potential embedded in address systems, which can be exploited in dynamic ways at any given discoursal instance. A convincing illustration of this is found in Ervin-Tripp's (1972) account of the Black physician who felt stripped of rank, position, and age by a White policeman addressing him as "boy." In tracing the social control function of nicknames within the family, we focus on this second, dynamic aspect of nickname use. Our interest here is in showing that alternations in naming practices can serve as important indexes in the language of social control—the use of an appellation sometimes being the sole carrier of both a mood and an elocutionary intent. Of particular interest is the double function of nicknames as both "aggravators" (intensifiers) and "mitigators" (softeners) of utterances meant to direct children's behavior.

In both the Israeli Jewish and the Jewish American dinner-table conversations we have recorded, the official name as well as the institutionalized nickname, spoken with a raised voice and an emphatic intonation, were occasionally used to perform a social control function in calling the child to order, telling him or her to stop whatever he or she was doing ("Hagit!"), or, when it is the child who is asking for attention, granting him or her permission ("Yes, David"). In most cases, though, naming practices do not stand isolated but combine with other linguistic means in the performance of social control acts. Thus, when the action is specified ("Nadavi, go wash your hands"), the use of the name or nickname preceding the utterance serves as a first signal for the control act to come. In trying to speed up compliance, the parent may further switch appellations, aggravating and intensifying a request by changing from name to nickname and vice versa, a sequence culminated in uttering either one as the sole carrier of the control act. In the following example, a father is talking to Dan (age 9), while fixing the son's bicycle:[2]

—Danny, I have not finished yet.

—Dan, stop!

—Danny!

In some cases, nicknames per se are used as aggravators or intensifiers. For example, in an Israeli family, Noga (age 4) is admonished by her mother: "Dai, dai, Nogi, ani otsi otax haxutsa! [Enough, enough, Nogi, I'll take you outside]" and Yonathan (age 8) is reprimanded: "Uton! Ma ata ose?! [Uton, what are you doing?]." In one of the Jewish

American families, repeated attempts to get Suzannah (age 4) to sit down, all addressing her as "Suzannah," culminate in "Sit down, Sue!" Another example is Jesse (age 9), who is always called Jesse except once, when his father says "Jess, that's enough!"

Yet far more common is the use of nicknames as mitigators, meant to soften the coercive impact of a directive. When a nickname prefaces or is appended to a directive, it usually serves a softening function, neutralizing the potential threat to face that attends directive use (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This mitigation mechanism is particularly salient when the obligation to comply with a request is lower—because it is unusual, or when the child it is addressed to is smaller. For this purpose, family members in Israel often revert to nonconventional morphological variations of the given name. In an example from our Israeli data, Hagit, a 5-year-old girl, is helping her mother set the table. The mother, apparently appreciative of her daughter's cooperation, instructs her to put spoons on the table, saying: "Hagitush, kapot, Havitush." The elliptical request for spoons (*kapot*) is embedded in between two free variations on the girl's name, Hagit, both of which are highly affectionate.

The used of nicknames as mitigators is particularly salient in Israeli families. This trend is evident in general preferences shown by Jewish American and Israeli parents in ways of marking for politeness when performing social control acts addressed to children. Israeli parents make extensive use of mitigated direct strategies, relying heavily on nicknames to serve the sweetening function, while Jewish American and American immigrant parents prefer to attend to the child's face needs by relying on conventional, indirect strategies.[3]

The interviews with the Israeli families further confirmed the salience of nicknames as mitigators in this culture. Asked in the course of an interview to "soften" a bald-on-record directive to a child, Israeli informants invariably responded by a shift in tone of voice and a questioning intonation, combined with an endearment suffix added to a name or nickname, so that [sivan] becomes [sivani] or [sivanush]. Jewish American respondents, on the other hand, marked the command for politeness by a shift in strategy from the direct to the conventionally indirect, typically using forms such as "could you" or "would you." Yet awareness of the power of nicknames as softeners is well established in both cultures. As we were told by a 10-year-old in one of the Jewish American families: "I call him 'Dad' on a normal basis, but if I am begging for something then I'll say 'Oh, please, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy." This last example brings forth the manipulative potential embedded in naming practices; both children and adults, across all groups, are aware of such uses. As one child put it: "When Mom says Danush I know she wants me to do something she needs." In these last cases, as in the cases to be discussed in the next section, the expressive function of nicknaming becomes salient as well.[4]

Nicknames Can Perform an Expressive Function

The use of a nickname may be indicative of the speaker's attitude toward the addressee. Affective nicknames are separately labeled as "terms of endearment" (*shmot hiba*) and are generally considered significant mechanisms for sustaining the family's relational web. As noted, there may be a discrepancy between the "sense" of the nickname and its intended function. Thus, even when the nickname is essentially derogatory, signifying a departure from some ideal norm (e.g., "Fatsy"), it may be used affectionately, as it often is within families. The close association between affect and the social boundaries of the family as a unit in the Israeli Jewish context has already been discussed. The use of the official name may signal the withdrawal of the affective connotations associated with the nickname (as in the Danny/Dan/Danny example mentioned earlier).

Another expressive function of nicknames relates to their role in articulating a person's mood. Informants were quite explicit about the fact that they interpreted the use of their nickname as a signal of the user's current mood. Thus the addition of affective diminutives to the name [jaroncik] for [jaron] is something an Israeli mother told us she engages in "in moments I feel like demonstrating a surplus of affection, when there is this special warmth; of course, it all depends on the mood." Children are well aware of the way the choice reflects the user's mood. In deliberation on the constraints on the choice between "Stephen" and "Steve," it is the son who supplies the rule for his father—"It is Stephen when you are angry."

A further expressive function of nicknames is the purely poetic one. During the interviews, both Jewish American and Israeli informants recalled several rhymed collocations they sometimes use in addressing their children. It is the sound play and the rhyme that binds these appellations rather than the meaning (e.g., [Yaron axbaron]/[Ofer blofer]/[Dan the Man]). In one case, the nickname evoked for its sound play (Pumpkin-Pie) was grounded in an actual "poetic" text: "I used to read the kids this poem which had the line 'Pumpkin pie—a little boy that did not cry,' so I called them both 'Pumpkin Pie.' "

Nicknames Can Perform a Framing Function

Given their association with participants' moods, nicknames are sometimes used to frame or reframe the interaction either as playful (in the case of affectionate nicknames) or as combative (in the case of derogatory ones). An example of the use of nicknames as playful framing devices, which comes from our Israeli data, is the following leave-taking exchange:

Ram (at the door):	"OK, bye."
Mother:	Bye, Rami.
Grandmother:	Bye, Avremele.
Ram (to his brother and sister):	OK, so bye monkeys.
Mother, sister and brother (together):	Bye, Rami.
Sister to Rami:	Bye, Doctor Famous.

We do not know whether Rami, the oldest son in the family, is in the habit of addressing his younger siblings as "monkeys," but we know that his sister has coined the nickname "Doctor Famous" in reference to a specific event that got her brother mentioned in the newspaper. Her use of this name sustained the playful frame already introduced by her brother through nickname use. In fact, more often than not, nicknames are used for humorous effect, introducing a playful, creative element into the routinized rounds of family interaction.

Nicknames can thus perform a variety of communicative functions, often simultaneously. These functions relate to the constitution of the family as a social group, to power relations within it, to the affective dimensions of family interaction, and to the metacommunicative task of defining the interactional situation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

The proliferation of nicknames around the dinner tables of the middle-class Israeli families participating in this study, and their relative scarcity in the dinner-table conversations of the Jewish American families seems, indeed, an interesting finding. We interpret this finding as manifesting differences in cultural styles grounded in cultural differences in processes of individuation, in assumptions concerning independence, and in rules for the display of involvement. For the Jewish American families, it is the official name that serves the individuating function. Even babies should know who they are in terms of the social identity encapsulated in their official name. Jewish American mothers

pointed out that they insisted on calling the newborn baby by his or her name from the very first day ("Asher is Asher and I want him to know he is Asher," a mother said with reference to her 3-week-old infant). Nicknaming by other members of the family is discouraged. The Jewish American cultural emphasis on the "development of self-sufficient individuals" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, & Swiddler, 1985, p. 57) is enacted by this insistence on a child acquiring a sense of selfhood through identification with his or her official name or its institutionalized variation, as used in parental address. In Israeli society at large, individuation often takes the form of a nickname. Many public figures in this society are known publicly by their nicknames only. The present mayor of Tel Aviv is "Chich," that of Jerusalem is "Teddy." In the family, it is not a specific nickname that marks the child as different but the particular set of nicknames, all associated with the child's name of his or her person.

Yet, while the two patterns may each contribute to establishing a sense of selfhood, they convey different messages in regard to the relation of self to others. In Bateson's (1972) terms, as interpreted by Tannen (1986), parents are constantly struggling with the dilemma of how to balance a need to show respect for a child's independence with the need to express affect. Anything said as a sign of affective involvement is interpretable as showing a lack of respect for individual space, while insistence on the dictum of nonimposition is amenable to being decoded as a lack of caring. Insistence on official names tips the balance in favor of nonimposition; thus, in the Jewish American families, it is the imposition-avoiding principles of deference-politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that are expressed through naming practices.

On the other hand, nicknames as such connote a feeling of closeness because their origin is always within a close-knit group of family or friends, so they carry an aura of intimacy even when used publicly. When the mayor is called "Chich," social distance between him and the public is suspended in favor of a rhetoric of camaraderie. The distance-minimizing function of nicknames, in the well-documented tradition of Israeli "solidarity politeness" (Blum-Kulka, Danet, & Gerson, 1985; Katriel, 1986), begins in the family.

By tipping the balance in favor of a display of involvement over respect for independence, Israeli parents are stressing both affect and intimacy. Hence, nicknames in this context index simultaneously the uniqueness of the child and familial bonding. Yet effusive nicknaming of children in the family involves a double message: Because the right to nickname other family members is not equally distributed (children do not usually nickname parents), such affective coloring of address

is also an expression of the asymmetrical power structure within the family.

These findings are particularly surprising if we consider the cultural affinity between the two groups in the sample: All are descendants of East European Jews and might be expected to share basic sociolinguistic patterns. And yet, in the course of one generation, acculturation processes have been strong enough to distinguish the groups from each other. For the Jewish Americans, it is the values of the American culture that predominate. For American immigrants in Israel, the picture is more complex: In some domains, like nicknaming patterns, the same values are preserved, while in others, such as the style of control, they develop an intercultural pattern of their own (Blum-Kulka, in press). Thus the difference between the groups testifies to the possibility of cultural change within a relatively short time span.

We were, indeed, surprised to discover that Israeli nicknames carried so many linguistic markers designating the Diaspora origin of their users, especially in the form of affixes. Both Russian and Yiddish influences are detected in the phonetic pattern of the Israeli nicknames. The Yiddish /-le/ or /-ile/ suffix: /asaf/ → /asafile/, /noa/ → /noale/. The Russian /-ik/ and /-ika/ suffix: /jaron/ → /jaronik/, /gali/ → /galika/, as well as the /sh/ and /tsh/ sounds embedded in the name, usually followed by one of the suffixes: /sivan/ → /sivantshik/ or /sivutsh/; /talja/ /tulish/; /mikal/ → /mushkale/; /jaron/ → /jarontshuk/. This category yields some highly creative "nonce nicknames" (i.e., created on the spur of the moment, perhaps never to be repeated) such as /tshapishaika/, /tushik/ and /tsahpuka/; /jonata/ → /onton/ and /ontik/. These last patterns are typical of address to very young children.

We found no equivalents in use in the immigrant American and Jewish American families, except for an occasional reference of a parent evoking a childhood memory of a Russian- or Yiddish-sounding nickname addressed to him or her by a grandparent. The reason for our surprise is the fact known to many Israelis, and documented in the onomastic literature (Weitman, 1988), that Israelis have tended deliberately to distance themselves from names that evoke their past Diaspora life and to choose names for their children that reflect a native Israeli identification. It appears, then, that, while care is taken to assume and project a native Israeli identity through the use of a native-sounding official Hebrew name, the East European, mainly Yiddish roots of these same speakers are allowed to thrive in the domestic domain and even become emblematic of a "sense of family." It is not that nicknames are not part of the sociolinguistic repertoire of Native Israeli (Sabra) culture. In fact, they are very common, and many of the old-time Israelis, the sung and unsung heroes of the prestate, nation-building days, still carry the nicknames pinned on them at the time as something of a badge of honor.

These nicknames, however, originated in and were strongly associated with the friendship network, which was the most important moving force in these people's lives (rather than the family, if it existed). We believe that the emergence of nicknaming practices as a central signifying mechanism in Israeli families, and the particular linguistic markers adopted in this process, are indicators of a more general reemergence of familism in Israeli society (Katriel, in press) as well as a newfound affirmation of Israelis' Diaspora roots (Cohen, 1983).

The nicknaming patterns in Jewish American families seem to be more North American than Jewish. When a suffix is added to a name, or a name shortened, the sound patterns are not restricted to family use or to the Jewish community; transformation of the Jewish name Deborah is equivalent to that of the non-Jewish one: Deborah becomes Debbie and Deb, but also, Jennifer becomes Jen. Even terms of endearment follow conventional patterns: Darling, Dear, Honey, Sweetie, Kid, Fella, Son, and Sonny (no equivalent for girls) are the only ones used by the North American parents, while Israeli parents add to the conventional ones (/xamud/xamudi/motek) some innovative phonetic play of their own (/pitsputs/ and /puski/). It is interesting that the immigrant Jewish American parents continue the North American tradition in this respect; they use even fewer nicknames than the Jewish American families and scarcely ever use terms of endearment. Children in these families often have two variations of their name: one Hebrew (Yael) and another English (Jennifer). In other cases, the name is phonetically "translated" from Hebrew to English and vice versa, to accommodate the constant code-switching between the two languages common in these families (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1989). Obviously, one must remember that dinner-table conversations may just not be the context in which nicknames find their natural place in this group, but the interview materials suggest that the pattern we have observed can be generalized to other familial contexts as well.

One question to be asked, of course, is whether the communicative functions performed by nicknames can be attributed to other sociolinguistic mechanisms in family interaction: How is social control affected? How is family solidarity signaled? How is mitigation accomplished? Another question relates to the sociocultural implications that spring from the presence or absence of particular communicative functions in family interaction: How can we describe and conceptualize the affiliative bonds of individuals (children, adults) within the family

given the particular patterns of appellation we observe? What is the role of the wider cultural context as compared with the more immediate situational context in the emergence of naming patterns? What can this tell us about the place of the family in the lives of cultural members?

Clearly, we can only begin to answer these and other questions that suggest themselves in reflecting upon the findings of this study. We hope we have shown the richness that lies in this seemingly simple, intriguing device whose mystery is still borne out by members of urbanized, complex societies.

NOTES

1. This story appears in a translated collection of Arab liberature; the translation into English is our own.

2. Such examples run contrary to Brown and Ford's (1961) observation that usually it is the official, given name that is used by parents "manding" disobedient children and to Gumperz's (1970) account of parents switching from nickname to official name by way of intensification. It seems that the general belief in the power of official names to index control is subject to contextual variation and that, when more than one term of address is used in sequence, it is the ordering rather than the choice that determines the function of each.

3. These preferences emerge from the distribution of directive strategies in parent-child interaction across the three groups between (a) direct (nonmitigated), (b) direct and mitigated, and (c) indirect. Parents in all three groups address direct, nonmitigated requests to their children 40% of the time. But, while the next choice for Israeli parents are mitigated-direct forms (40%), for the American parents, it is the indirect mode that prevails here (40%). The American immigrant parents' preferences are equally divided between the three options (Blum-Kulka, in press).

4. Nicknames can be openly pejorative and function as sanctioning devices. This usage is widespread in Mediterranean countries as well as among Arabs (see Antoun, 1968; Griefat, 1986; Griefat & Katriel, 1989). Interview data we have collected from Israeli speakers of Arabic suggest that, although many derogatory nicknames are reported to have been coined within the family circle, usually by adults or older siblings addressing younger children, they are frequently adopted by others and sometimes accompany a person through life. We have been told of incidents in which children went to great lengths to prevent their siblings from spreading their derogatory home-based nicknames among their peers at school. The use of such nicknames among adults is strictly guarded and confined to contexts of mention (never address), even though familiarity with community members' nicknames is widespread. Some of the Arab informants we have interviewed stressed the fact that, in the Koran, there is an explicit injunction against the use of nicknames, but most admitted to using them at least in addressing young children.

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5

Uncertainty Reduction in Acquaintance Relationships in Ghana and the United States

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The study examines cultural differences in the use of interactive uncertainty reduction communication—self-disclosure, interrogation, nonverbal immediacy, and other's self-disclosure—and their interrelationships with uncertainty reduction in intra- and interethnic acquaintance relationships in Ghana and the United States. Cultural differences were noted in how these forms of communication are used to reduce uncertainty. Implications for extant theory and future research are discussed.

Communication is the foundation of interpersonal relationships. Yet, for years, communication scholars have struggled with various theories that attempt to explain the relationships but not necessarily the communication creating those relationships. One approach that does focus on the communication forming relationships is uncertainty reduction theory. The theory has generated substantial intracultural and intercultural research. Unfortunately, current research has primarily been limited to studying uncertainty reduction communication in the United States (or other Western cultures) and in Asian cultures. This research seeks to broaden our understanding of uncertainty reduction theory by examining the interactive uncertainty reduction process in intra- and interethnic acquaintance relationships in the United States and the West African nation of Ghana.

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