

THE NAMES OF LOVE:
VOCATIVES AND SIGNATURES IN VALENTINE MESSAGES

EIRLYS E. DAVIES

Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fez, Morocco

Introduction

Vocatives, as terms by which speakers designate their addressees, are a well established linguistic category, even in languages like English where they are not identifiable by case-marking. Their distinctive syntactic status has been noted, their functions listed and discussed. In particular, the ways in which they may be used to signal information about the relationship between speaker and addressee have attracted considerable attention, and they are often cited in linguistics textbooks as examples of linguistic markers power and solidarity (see, for instance, Bell 1976; Dittmar 1976; Lyons 1977). Particular interest has been paid to the use of terms of address within dyads, and to the implications of the various types of reciprocal and non-reciprocal usage favoured by particular dyads (see, for instance, Brown and Ford 1964; Ervin-Tripp 1972; Kroger, Cheng and Leong 1979; Kroger, Wood and Beam 1984; Kroger, Wood and Kim 1984; Hook 1984). Their role as markers of politeness is discussed by Brown and Levinson (1978).

In this study I should like to draw attention to a rather different kind of pairing. Rather than looking at the vocatives a person gives to another and receives from this other, I shall examine the terms people use to address others and the terms they use to identify themselves to these others. We may adopt the label *signature* to identify the category which can be considered to parallel vocatives in this way; while vocatives are used to refer to the individual(s) to whom a message is addressed, signatures serve to refer to the sender(s) of the message. In fact, signatures, as the traditional meaning of the term suggests, do not normally appear in spoken discourse, for senders who deliver a message orally do not usually need to resort to such labelling, although they do frequently find vocatives useful. It is perhaps this difference which has caused signatures to be ignored by linguists whereas vocatives have received due attention. However, in written contexts the parallel be-

tween vocative and signature is much clearer, the obvious example being that of letters and other messages from one individual to another, which typically open with a vocative and close with a signature. A very simple example is provided by (1):

(1) *John – Just missed you, Will call again at 6. Mary.*

The structural parallel seems clear here; the signature, like the vocative, bears no close syntactic relation to other sentence elements. There is also a functional similarity, for the signature too may be seen to reflect the relationship between writer and addressee; to see this, one need only consider the differing effects that would be achieved were the note in (1) to be signed, not *Mary*, but *M.E. Smith*, *Moggles*, or *your loving Mary*. A signature sometimes corresponds to the vocative which the signer would expect the addressee to use to him or her. For instance, a signature consisting of a nickname is unlikely to be used except where the addressee is someone in a position to use this nickname to the signer, and sometimes a change of signature may act as a signal that the addressee is now authorised to use the modified form as a vocative; consider, for example, the implication when someone who is in the habit of signing letters to a certain business partner J. Smith shifts to using *John* instead. However, the correspondence is not always as simple as this, for the possible forms for signatures are, like those for vocatives, governed by specific conventions; there are obvious differences, such as the fact that titles are common in vocatives but not usually a feature of signatures, while initials are frequent in signatures but not in vocatives. The role of signatures in signalling the relationship between participants seems to have been quite ignored, in contrast to that of vocatives. It is interesting to note, for instance, that in one of relatively few studies of how status and solidarity are signalled in specifically written communication (McMullen and Krahn 1985), where subjects were required to write letters to different types of addressee, the subjects were actually instructed not to include signatures in their letters; evidently signatures were not considered interesting as potential markers of status or solidarity, although terms of address were included in the analysis made.

In particular speech communities there may be quite rigid conventions governing the kinds of vocatives and signatures to be used in particular circumstances. In many situations there may be only one kind of vocative which is considered appropriate; for instance, an employee may have no choice but to address his or her employer using title + last name (TLN). Likewise, in written English, formal business letters constitute a context where the types of vocative and signature to be used are strictly prescribed. On the other hand, there are situations where people may have at their disposal a choice of several different terms by which they may address a particular individual or identify themselves to this individual. In general, it would seem that such choices are more likely to exist when the participants are equals or intimates than when one is in a position of greater power than the other. It has been noted, for instance, that relationships between intimates are often characterised by the use of several alternative vocatives, used interchangeably by one

to the other. Brown and Ford (1964:238) label this phenomenon 'multiple names', and find it to correlate with intimacy, relating it to the principle that "the degree of lexical differentiation of a referent field increases with the importance of that field to the community" (1964:238). Perhaps the most striking instance of a relationship which allows and seemingly encourages such variation is that between spouses or lovers. In a wide range of cultures, there appears to be a strong tendency for such partners to devise special, exclusive names for each other, rather than using the labels also available to lesser acquaintances, such as first names (FN). This kind of renaming could be seen as symbolising the changed status which each member of the couple acquires through their relationship. In what follows I would like to look more closely at the labels by which lovers address their partners and those by which they identify themselves to their partners.

Unfortunately, the personal and private nature of such usage makes it rather difficult to investigate; outside such literary contexts as poetry or published letters, it is not easy to collect instances of the phenomenon. Many of the names we are interested in may be used by the couple only when alone, or within intimate circles, and they may be unwilling to disclose them to a curious stranger. However, there is one readily accessible source which seems to offer copious examples of such naming practices among the British. On February 14 each year, the British national newspapers print extensive lists of Valentine's Day messages, composed and paid for by individuals and addressed to other individuals. A scrutiny of the content of these messages leads to the conclusion that in most cases the sender and addressee already constitute a couple, with an existing intimate relationship, the function of the message typically being a declaration of the sender's romantic love for the addressee. We thus have a situation where seemingly very private communications between partners are exposed to the general public. It must of course be recognised that this is a rather peculiar situation, and the motivations of those who choose this public medium for their valentine messages may be quite complex (for a discussion of these, see Davies 1988). We cannot therefore assume that the expressions used in these press valentines are entirely typical of those which the same individual might use to their partners in other contexts. However, they are nevertheless very interesting as a particular instance of communication between lovers, and therefore seem worthy of study in their own right. The discussion below is based on a set of 1,378 valentine messages which appeared in *The Daily Express* on 14 February 1987. Through an examination of these, I hope to shed some light on the particular strategies used by lovers in labelling their partners and themselves, as well as achieving some more general insights into the communicative functions of vocatives and signatures and the relations between the two.

We are here concerned with only two components of the messages: the terms by which the senders designate the intended recipients of the messages, and the terms by which they identify themselves. The vast majority of instances of the first category in fact consist of vocatives, while the majority of cases of the second category constitute what we have called signatures. However, there are also instances

of a less common pattern, where the recipient and/or sender may be referred to in the third person, as in the following examples.

(2) *Carol C. loves Doug B.*

(3) *Chatterbox loves gorgeous blue eyes very much.*

There are also some cases in which the sender and/or recipient of the message is clearly marked as such by a prepositional phrase with *to* or *from*:

(4) *To Grip from your future Mrs Rigall.*

(5) *To Allan. Happy Valentine. Love from wife Di. XXX.*

Despite the different syntactic status of the labels in these cases, their communicative functions appear to be similar to those of the vocatives and signatures which feature in the majority of these valentine messages. For convenience, then, we shall use the labels vocatives and signatures to refer to our two classes, even though they also include a small number of examples like (2)-(5). Among the 1,378 valentine messages in our corpus, 1,350 vocatives and other addressee labels were found, together with 1,140 signatures and labels for senders. In a few cases more than one vocative occurred in a single message. There were also 19 cases where it was not possible to determine whether a label was intended to designate addressee or sender and these have been excluded from the totals.

Zwicky (1974), basing his division on one made by Schegloff (1968), identifies two functions of vocatives, which he labels calls and addresses, Calls, he suggests, "are designed to catch the addressee's attention" while addresses are used "to maintain or emphasize the contact between speaker and addressee" (1974:787). While the application of the first of these labels is fairly clear, the definition of addresses seems rather vague. One might attempt to interpret the distinction as one between two discursual functions of vocatives, a call being typically a vocative which opens a discourse by drawing the addressee's attention to the fact that he or she is being addressed, while an address might contribute to sustaining a discourse by serving as a reminder of the fact that this individual is being addressed. However, we would then have to recognise that large numbers of vocatives do not seem to fit into either of these categories; consider, for instance, the case of a vocative used alone to reprimand someone, to express astonishment at the addressee's behaviour, or to remind the addressee of some previously established agreement. On the other hand, the term address could be given a broader interpretation. Quirk et al. (1985), for instance, adopt the same two labels as Zwicky, but appear to have reinterpreted the term address, which they define as "expressing the speaker's relationship or attitude to the person or person addressed" (1985:773). Under this interpretation, calls and addresses seem to be categories of very different types. A vocative may be identifiable as a call by virtue of its opening position in a discourse, as perhaps in Quirk et al.'s example *John, dinner's ready*, whereas the function of an address evidently depend on its semantic content (consider Quirk et al.'s examples *And that, my friends, concludes my speech* and *My back is aching, Doctor*). Moreover,

the term call seems to identify a particular type illocutionary act, which could also be described as a summons, and which a vocative alone could plausibly be considered to perform. On the other hand, in the examples cited for addresses, the vocative itself seems not to constitute an illocutionary act at all, but rather to be an accompaniment to or a component of the one performed by the rest of the utterance. However, this interpretation of the distinction (which appears to be that adopted by Levinson 1983:71) also seems problematic, for a vocative may be only a component of a larger call, as in (*Hey, you!* or *I say, Fred!*), and one can find instances where what is presumably an address does constitute an independent illocutionary act: *you idiot* could be an insult or a criticism, *you angel* a compliment, *my darling* an act of reassuring, encouraging, etc. If the distinction is based on illocutionary force, then, the class of calls would seem to be associated with a single type of force whereas that of addresses covers a wide range of other forces.

Partly because of these difficulties in interpreting and using Zwicky's classification of vocatives, I shall draw a somewhat different distinction in this study. I prefer to regard the term call as just one among many labels for illocutionary acts which may be useful in describing the force of vocatives. However, instead of listing numerous illocutionary forces, I shall draw a single distinction between two fundamental communicative functions of vocatives, which can be described as the identificatory and expressive functions (see also Davies 1983, 1986). The two are by no means exclusive: as will be illustrated below, large numbers of vocatives can be considered to perform both of these functions simultaneously. One advantage of this framework of description is that it is of wider application than that of Zwicky, in that it can also be useful in describing the functions of signatures; this may allow us to capture the parallels between vocatives and signatures, which seem to have hitherto gone unnoticed.

The identificatory function

Press valentine messages constitute a type of discourse where the verbal identification of the intended addressee is perhaps peculiarly important. Given that each message is set alongside hundreds of others, all very similar from a visual point of view and crowded together in closely packed lines of newsprint, it is clearly essential for the success of such messages that their intended recipients be able to recognise which messages are addressed to them. The means of identification, in the vast majority of cases, is provided by a vocative which nearly always constitutes the opening word(s) of the message. There are of course good reasons why a vocative which is needed to identify the addressee should precede the rest of the message; in a spoken utterance, this will ensure that the individual concerned, once clearly assigned addressee status, has the opportunity to pay full attention to what follows. In the case of press valentines, the initial position is particularly strongly motivated, however. The messages are arranged in alphabetical order on the basis of the first word of each message, so that if the first word is the usual term by which the

sender addresses the receiver, the latter is likely to find the message without too much difficulty.

The most obvious examples of vocatives and signatures which have a clearly identificatory function are those consisting of first names, which constitute the largest group in both categories; a total of 649 vocatives (48% of the total number) and 530 signatures (46,5%) were of this type. Where the FN is a particularly common name, it may not seem to provide sufficiently distinctive identification by itself; in this sample, for instance, there are eight different messages using the vocative *Julie*, six using the vocative *John*, five using *Sarah*, and so on. However, it should perhaps be noted that the vocative is usually only one among other components of the message which also contribute to an adequate identification of the addressee. In particular, the signature may, paradoxically, have an important role to play in ensuring that the addressee is successfully identified; the *Julie* who is expecting a message from *Freddie*, for instance, is unlikely to mistake as intended for her one which is addressed to *Julie* but signed *Buster*. Likewise, a vocative which successfully identifies the addressee may in fact make the identifying role of the signature redundant, for once individuals know that a particular message is addressed to them, they may be left in no doubt as to the sender. Both vocative and signature, in effect, may contribute to the personalisation of the message; in some cases it may be only the combination of the two which allows recognition of the intended participants, in others the presence of one or the other may be sufficient, as is presumably the case in examples like the following:

(6) *I love you in blue. I love all of you. Mittens.*

(7) *Pony, nuts forever.*

Other aspects of the message, such as the use of catchphrases commonly exchanged by the couple, or reference to shared experiences, secrets, or private jokes, may of course also contribute to this purpose. Presumably this is true of the rare instances, like those below, where neither sender nor addressee is labelled, or where the labels used seem not specific enough to contribute to identification.

(8) *Together as one.*

(9) *For a special lady. Socks and lemons!*

It should be recognised, then, that although vocatives and signatures often serve the purpose of identifying the addressee, they are not the exclusive means of achieving this purpose.

The identifying efficiency of a FN may be increased through the inclusion of some further accompanying item, such as an epithet, as in *Postman Dave*, *Big Bertie*, *Jazzy James*, though such additions may also have an expressive function, as will be seen later. For instance, as well as five messages containing the vocative *Sue*, we find one using *Super Sue*, and besides five using the Vocative *Sandra*, one is addressed to *Sandra Starbird* and another to *my smooth Sandra*. Altogether, 85 vocatives and 16 signatures were composed of a first name and one or more modifiers.

A few others included an appositive element giving other identifying information, as in *Jack, W.Yorks and Barry (Jeddah)*. The inclusion of a initial in addition to a FN (found in 10 vocatives and 7 signatures, as in *Sue G.*, *Anne M.*) also seems likely to be motivated by a concern with identification. However, both this and what might seem perhaps the most obvious way of ensuring clear identification of the sender or addressee – the use of FN together with surname (LN) – are relatively rarely adopted in this sample. Only 44 vocatives and 12 signatures use FNLN. One reason for this may be that such vocatives and signatures, while efficient as a means of identifying those concerned, carry expressive meaning of a type which would not be in keeping with the tone of most of these valentines. The use of FNLN suggests a level of impersonality and distance which would conflict with the extremely intimate nature of the rest of the message. In the second place, even as a means of identification, such labels could be considered too efficient, for it seems important to recognise that in most cases the sender of a press valentine is usually concerned only to ensure that the addressee can recognise the message intended for him or her, and not to make the identity of the addressee clear to other people, even if they are friends or relatives. The use of the addressee's full name might thus be felt to provide unwelcome public exposure. It is one of the paradoxes of this type of valentine that, although presented in an extremely public medium, the majority of the messages probably manage to maintain perfect privacy, in the sense that no one outside the actual couple is likely to be able to guess with any degree of certainty the identity of the sender and addressee (for discussion see Davies 1988). One of the techniques which may ensure this privacy is the use of intimate pet names rather than FNs. These will often be particularly effective at uniquely identifying sender and addressee, since they tend to be idiosyncratic; thus, while we find strings of valentines addressed to Steve or Jenny, there is in this sample only one addressed to *Puffin Plumber* and one addressed to *Potato*.

Those rare cases where sender and/or addressee are identified by FNLN differ in tone from the others. The following examples are representative:

(10) *John King, Eleven years, who'd have believed it, I love you. Margaret Nugent.*

(11) *Denise Keegan. Will you be my wife as well as my valentine. Love you John Lound.*

(12) *Mark Ranby, love you, forever yours, Anna.*

(13) *Sam Clouston of Orkney with love from your wife G. F. Clouston.*

The last example here is particularly striking, in that even further efforts are made to make identification clear, through the inclusion of the place as well as full names. The sharpness of the identification in such cases gives the whole the tone of a public declaration rather than that of an intimate confidence, and we have here the impression that the sender actually enjoys the knowledge that the message may be read and understood by others apart from its addressee. However, such examples are very much the exception in this sample.

While we can safely say that the vast majority of all the vocatives used in these valentine messages play a part in making the identification of the addressee possible, at least for the addressee, the identificatory role of signatures is somewhat less clear. The situation here is complicated by the fact that valentines are traditionally anonymous messages. This tradition does not seem to be widely respected today among the senders of press valentines; the majority of our examples do contain a signature, in the form of a FN or nickname, which would appear to provide the addressee with sufficient information to identify the sender. Nevertheless, in some cases the sender seems, if not to ensure anonymity, to make at least a token gesture in the direction of tradition by using, rather than a name, something that appears to be slightly more enigmatic. Thus we find instances where the signature consists of a definite description which sounds like a nom-de-plume: examples include the *Fallen Madonna with the Big Boobies*, the *Rotating Bedpan*, the *Penguin Lover*, the *Godmother*, the *Late Night Gourmet*, the *Purple Rose of Cairo* and others. Cases like these illustrate the difficulties faced by the outside observer in trying to analyse such material. In the first place, it is often not possible to deduce whether the signature used constitutes an actual nickname by which the sender is known, or at least a description previously applied to him or her, or whether it is a newly coined description which the sender has composed specifically for this context. Moreover, we have no way of knowing the extent to which the description really is unclear to the addressee. It seems likely that the majority of such cases involve only a mock obscuring of identity, so that the signature can still be considered to have an identifying function; it is merely that the identification is achieved through a somewhat more indirect means than a name or nickname.

The tradition of anonymity might also be invoked to account for the many instance where the identification of the addressee seems to be more explicit than that provided for the sender. For instance, there are 258 messages (18,7% of the total number) with no signature at all, as in (14) and (15), whereas only 71 messages (5,2%) lack any label for the addressee.

(14) *Jackie Hooper, I love you.*

(15) *Colette, Guess what, I love you.*

Likewise, as has already been noted, the use of FNLN is much more frequent in vocatives than in signatures. On the other hand, the relative obscurity of initials alone is adopted for a total of 79 signatures (6,9%) as opposed to 53 vocatives (3,9%). In fact, then, there are many instances where the vocative offers a noticeably clearer identification than the signature, as in the following:

(16) *Jonathan Mills. Loving you is like a lifetime in paradise. Love and kisses, Sarah.*

(17) *Joanne Jarvis, my own darling Eskimo. I love you forever. Graham.*

(18) *Claire MacKenzie, The girl I desire, the only one to set my heart on fire, be my valentine - S -*

(19) *Sharon, love and fondest thoughts your one and only. A.H.*

(20) *Settee. Take the rubbish out now! Love J.*

There are, however, other possible explanations for why the identification of the addressee tends to be given more importance than that of the sender. The different positions of vocative and signature influence the extent to which their information content may be redundant; since the typical vocative in our sample opens the message, any information it carries may be considered new, whereas by the time the signature is reached, at the end, the identity of the sender may already be clear, so that as an identifier the signature is unnecessary. The motives of the sender may also be relevant here; in choosing to send a press valentine at all, the sender's prime aim may be to have a certain impact on the addressee (for which clear identification of this addressee is a necessary condition), while maintaining a low profile for him-or herself.

The Expressive function

The second major function of the labels used for sender and addressee can be summarised as that of expressing the attitude of one towards the other, or the relationship between the two. This too may be expected to be an important function of the vocatives and signatures in valentine messages, given that their overall purpose seems typically to be just such an expression of feeling, a celebration of the relations between two people. In fact, the effectiveness of vocatives and signatures as expressions of feeling is reflected in the fact that certain of the messages in our sample seem to consist exclusively of vocatives and/or signatures

(21) *Bobby, You rat!*

(22) *Buno, Your always love Loopy.*

(23) *Heartbreaker. Darling.*

(24) *Rabbit the one I love. Piggy.*

The messages in these examples surely constitute declarations of their senders' feelings just as well as do those composed of statements formulated through declaratives such as *I love you*.

It might perhaps be argued that even vocatives and signatures consisting of FNs can be considered to have an expressive element; certainly, in other contexts, the reciprocal use of FN as a term of address in English is considered to signal a certain degree of solidarity or familiarity between speakers (see, for instance, Brown and Ford 1964; Ervin-Tripp 1972; Hook 1984). However, in the context of valentine messages the use of FNs seems significant than it might be in other contexts; in fact, its expressive value would seem to be more or less uninformative here, since the senders and receivers of these messages tend to be individuals who already share a close relationship of the type where reciprocal use of FN vocatives would

be unexceptional. It is of course possible that an individual might choose to address a valentine message to someone with whom he/she is still on distant, formal terms; but in this case, surely the fact of sending a valentine message at all would constitute a more striking move towards familiarity than the mere use of an FN vocative, so that even here the use of FN would not in itself have a great deal of expressive impact.

On the other hand, we have already noted some cases where FNLN is used, as in (10)-(13), and there are some even more exceptional instances (15 vocatives and 5 signatures) which involve the use of a title:

- (25) *Mrs. Garfield, thank you for being you, love you. A.*
- (26) *Mr Joseph Jimenez I love you forever and ever.*
- (27) *Miss Sheila Manning, I love you, be my valentine, love Fraggie.*
- (28) *Miss P. Long. Pick us a winnder. Love Neil X.*

The vocatives here could perhaps be considered to be expressively marked, in that the use of full name or title seems to impart a certain formality and solemnity, giving them an almost ceremonial tone. However, the effect seems more often than not to be that of only mock formality, as is sometimes evidenced from the content of the rest of the message; for instance, in (27), although the full name is used for the addressee, the sender is identified through what seems to be a nickname.

We have already noted the fact that pet names or nicknames (NNs) can be as effective at identifying sender or addressee as FNs are; the considerable inventiveness and originality displayed by the creators of NNs ensure that they are often highly distinctive. However, unlike FNs, they are also capable of carrying a heavy load of expressive meaning. Indeed, from the point of view of communicative efficiency, they may be considered particularly useful as vocatives and signatures in valentine messages, since they provide an economical means of fulfilling both identificatory and expressive functions simultaneously. The expressive value of NNs is twofold. In the first place, the mere fact that the sender addresses the recipient of the message by a NN implies a level of familiarity greater than that required for the use of FN; it is normally only relatively close acquaintances or family members who can acceptably address an individual by a NN¹. In the second place, a NN, unlike a FN, can usually be understood to carry some semantic content; typically it constitutes a description of the referent. This affords the users of NNs plenty of scope to convey their attitudes towards and view of the referent. It is worth looking in some detail at the ways in which the NNs in these valentines are used to convey this type of expressive meaning.

There is some difficulty in determining the total number of nicknames in our corpus. For example, we have assumed, unless there is evidence to the contrary,

¹ The restrictions on using NNs referentially rather than vocatively are of course not as great; people may adopt NNs even for a distant superior (e.g. schoolchildren for their teacher, employees for a boss), but they will not normally venture to address the individual by the NN in such cases.

that the FNs used in messages are genuine FNs, but of course it is quite possible that some of them are being used as NNs (sometimes even an outsider may strongly suspect that this is the case, as in a message addressed to Basil from Sybil, where the two FNs used are those of a couple in a well-known television comedy). We have in fact ignored a total of 21 instances where it was felt to be impossible to determine whether a label was a FN or a NN. Moreover, as was noted earlier, it is not possible for an outsider to distinguish true NNs, regularly used within the couple, from one-off descriptions or noms-de-plume. Accordingly, I have established a single class containing NNs and descriptive labels; 480 vocatives (35,5%) and, surprisingly, exactly 480 signatures too (42,1%) were found in this category.

A large proportion of the NNs in this sample appear to carry information about some aspect of their referent's physical or psychological make-up. Such information may be conveyed by means of a noun, alone (Brains) or with modification (Lazy Bones), or by means of an adjective (Tubby). Physical descriptions are particularly common; these may be general descriptions of size or shape (Fatso, Titch, Chubby, Lofty, Dwarf) or appeal to a particular sense (Smelly, Scratchy, Scruffy). Others suggest sex appeal (Sex Kitten, Sexpot, Brazen Huzzy, He Man). The most popular sources of inspiration, however, seem to be specific parts of the body. These may focus on limbs (Little Legs, Thunder Thighs, Nobby Knees, Floppy Legs, Hot Thighs, Hairy Arms) or the curvaceous parts of the body (Fat Belly, Squiggy Boobs, Sexy Bum, Wobbly Bum, Smelly Bum, Big Girly Bottom), but most popular of all are descriptions of the head, hair or facial features (Tatty Head, Curly, Blondie, Fat Face, Pasta Face, Dimples, Dimple Cheek, Blue Eyes, Spider Lashes, Cold Nose, Soft Lips, Baby Teeth, Fag Breath Sue.). As for non-physical descriptions, these include many concerned with intelligence (Brain Box, Brains, Silly Head, Smartarse, Sillyarse) and some referring to types of behaviour apparently associated with the referent (The Nagger, Grumpy, Chatterbox, Lazy Bones, Grinner, Sniffer, Piano Player, Footwarmer).

Two aspects of this set of descriptive names seem worthy of note: the extent to which they seem to be non-serious, indeed often humorous, in tone, and the tendency for their descriptions to be derogatory rather than complimentary. Rather than suggesting the serious feelings of the sender, or emphasising the virtues or beauty of the addressees, the majority of these names seem at best to be teasing or ridiculing, and at worst contain content which might well be taken as insulting or unkind, were the name to be used in another context. The invocation of properties which are either embarrassing for their possessors, so trivial or intimate as to provoke mirth, or apparently undesirable flows, might seem to suggest the user's negative view of the referent of the name. In fact, however, such strategies seem an effective means of emphasising the closeness of the relationship which binds sender and addressee. The fact that the sender is able to apply to the addressee a vocative which seems to mock or degrade is of course evidence of the familiarity and intimacy of their relationship; and likewise, the sender who applies such a nickname to him/herself, in a signature, is acknowledging the addressee's right to use such a description, and thus similarly emphasising their solidarity².

² These derogatory NNs could be compared to the more systematic use of what McDowell (1981) terms "ugly names" among the Kamss community of Colombia. McDowell emphasises the "fun

There are some instances where quite the opposite strategy is adopted, in that a NN appears to attribute high status or value to its referent, thereby assigning it a certain dignity and possibly even idealising it. Naturally enough, the examples of this kind are vocatives rather than signatures, and tend to suggest the sender's placing of the addressee on a pedestal. The few instances of this type include *Princess*, *Empress*, *My princess*, *Precious*, *Little Princess*, *Princess*, *Honeypot*, *Lady Lee*, to which we may perhaps add *Captain*, *Captain Len*, and *Superperson 86*, though it is of course possible that the latter may be used tongue in cheek. The modern trend, at least in press valentines, then would seem to be far removed from the idealised, romantic type of epithet associated with the traditional Victorian valentine. The current tendency to avoid this kind of NN might be explained by the fact that using a description which elevates or idealises the addressee may at the same time suggest a certain distance between sender and addressee. The senders of modern press valentines evidently prefer instead to come as close as possible to their partners, using descriptions which epitomise familiarity rather than admiration.

Besides those which provide more or less explicit descriptions of their referents, a large proportion of the NNs used in our sample can be considered as metaphorical. It should perhaps be noted again that here, as in all attempts by an outsider to interpret this material, the true significance of a particular example may be inaccessible to all but its original user; nevertheless, the material is interesting enough to warrant at least some attempt at objective evaluation. In fact, the metaphorical labels tend to fall into a few large groups, about which some tentative generalisations can be made.

By far the largest group consists of NNs based on names of animals, which account for 111 vocatives and 121 signatures, 23.1% and 25.2% of the total numbers of NNs in each category. Among these the animals most commonly invoked are cats and rabbits. NNs based on the cat include *Cat*, *Topcat*, *Puusycat*, *Pussy* (several occurrences), *Cuddlepuss*, *Sungglepuss*, *Mrs. Puss*, *Bagpuss*, *Moggie*, *Kitten* and *Sex Kitten*, while those inspired by rabbits include *Rabbit*, *Rabbit Love*, *Baby Wabbit*, *Bunny* (several occurrences), *Little Bunny* and *Cooky Bunny* (though see below for an alternative interpretation of this NN). The popularity of these sources would seem to be traceable to the fact that they constitute small, furry, domestic animals with particularly cuddly associations. In fact, if we attempt to identify a general underlying metaphor, of the type proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), of which the majority of the animal NNs can be considered to be specific realisations, we might propose something like "People we love are soft, cuddly and tame". The many NNs based on bears can be considered to conform to this generalisation, since the inspiration here seems usually to be the teddy bear, again with its cuddly

damental discourtesy" of the ugly name, which he describes as "an unkind identifying description" (1981:8), but later notes that "the name bearer is classified as an insider rather than an outsider by virtue of the ugly name, since these nicknames are attached only to members of the indigenous community" (1981:12).

connotations, rather than the wild animal; we find, for instance, *Teddy Bear*, *Running Bear*, *Poor Bear*, *Care Bear*, *Loving Bear*, *Panda* (several occurrences) and *Panda Cuddle Paws*, together with *Pooh Bear* and *Paddington Bear* based on specific famous teddy bears. There is also a noticeable tendency for the names to suggest young rather than adult animals. This may be signalled through the use of a label specific to young animals, as in *Kitten*, *Pup*, *Pet Lamb*, *Piglet* and *Chicky Chick*, or through modifiers or diminutive suffixes, as in *Baby Wabbit*, *Little Chicklet*, *Little Bunny* or *Snakelet*. Finally, similar connotations may be suggested through the use of a term reminiscent of baby talk or young children's usage, as in *Ducky Wucky*, *Bunny*, *Pussy* and *Woof Woof*. In some cases, an animal almost invariably crops up in forms carrying this babyish connotation; we find, for instance, *Pup*, *Puppling*, *Bunglepups*, *Mucky Pup*, *Poochie* and *Woof Woof*, but only one instance of *Dog*. As we shall see later, the tendency to use labels suggesting babyhood or childhood is evident in other types of NN too, and we could perhaps propose a second general metaphor, "People we love are babies/small children".

Names of less familiar or wild animals do appear, but relatively infrequently; we find several instances of *Tiger* and one instance each of *Lion*, *Fox*, *Hedgehog*, *Hippo*, *Moose*, *Owl*, *Sparrow* and *Chipmonk* (in the last of which the cuddly connotation may still be present). In other cases modifiers or affixes seem to be used to detract from the originally undomesticated image of the animal invoked: consider *Tame Gorilla*, *Moley*, *Wolfie*, *Ratty*, *Froggy*, *Frogger*, *Slugs*, *Bugs*, *Mr. Mouse*. One apparently uncuddly animal which is popular, however, is the pig, as evidenced by *Pig*, *Piglet* (several occurrences), *Pigglet*, *Little Pig*, *Piggy* (several occurrences), *Piggy Paul*, *Pink Pig*, *Mr. Piggles*, *Mrs. Piggles*, and the *Pig*. Again, in some of these examples, connotations are created through suffixes or modifiers; but there would also seem to be another factor related to the popularity of names based on this animal. This is the tendency, already discussed with reference to the literally descriptive NNs, to prefer names which sound teasing or derogatory. The term *pig* in English is of course commonly used metaphorically to describe a person, when it usually suggests negatively viewed qualities such as greed, dirt, clumsiness, selfishness or chauvinism³. Its use to a lover, then, whether or not elaborated by further modification, may carry overtones of playful criticism which, as we have seen, serve to emphasise the solidarity between partners. The same tendency may account for the occurrence of certain animal terms whose associations would seem to be diametrically opposed to those of the soft, cuddly type, as in *Toad* (which crops up six times in our sample), *Frog* (several occurrences), *Maggot*, *Leech*, *Grasshopper* and *Shrimp*. Finally, a third possible motivation for certain animal NNs is that

³ Indeed, the overall popularity of animal nicknames among lovers could be related to a much more general tendency to use animal names metaphorically to describe human beings. This seems to be an extremely common phenomenon in many languages, and such metaphors seem to be on the whole more frequently interpreted as signalling negative or undesirable qualities of people than positive ones (many examples are provided in Fraser 1981 and Davies and Bentahila 1989). The application of animal NNs to lovers can thus, like the apparently insulting descriptive NNs noted earlier, be considered a sign of familiarity and intimacy.

they may have been inspired, not by properties or associations of real animals, but rather by cartoon, media or other fictional characters. This is sometimes evident from the name, as with *Miss Piggy*, *Pooh Bear*, *Bugs Bunny* and *Pink Panther*, but there may also be other such cases where the source is not evident to an outsider.

A second fairly large group of metaphorical NNs consists of those based on food (36 vocatives and 24 signatures, 7.5% and 5% of the NN totals respectively). Here again a general metaphorical concept of the type postulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) can be considered to underlie a considerable number of NNs; this could be paraphrased as "People we love taste sweet". For instance, we find frequent references to honey (*Honeybun*, *Honeypot*, *Honeybunch*, *Honey Bunny*) and other sweet foods, as in *Sugar*, *Sugar Lumps*, *Sugar Plum*, *Treacle Top*, *Doughnut*, *Strawberry Tart*, *Sweetie Pie*, *Lollypop*, *Choc Chip*, *Cooky Bunny*, *Mousse*, *Pudding*, *Cherry*, *Bakewell Tart* (although other sources remain possible for some of these, notably the last two, and the second component of *Honey Bunny* and *Cooky Bunny* could be related to both *bun* and *rabbit*, both interpretations seeming plausible as they each fit within one of the general metaphors already noted). Other food metaphors seem less systematic, but one suspects that at least some might be inspired by physical or behavioural properties of the referent (*String Bean*, *Pudding*, *Hard Boiled Eggs*, *Guinness Bottle*, *Banana Man* and *Fruit Pot* might be cases in point). There are also a number of NNs apparently based on meat: *Lambchops*, *Porkchops*, *Sausage*, *Beefy*, *Spam*, *Spammy* and *Higgis*.

Metaphors based on plants are relatively rare in this sample (7 vocatives and 5 signatures), and predictably tend to invoke flowers: *Flower* (several occurrences), *my prairie flower*, *my darling sweetpea*, *my gorgeous raspberry flower*, *Passion Flower*, and possibly *Poppy* (two occurrences) and *Lankee Rose*, though these last could well be based on personal names. The traditional romantic description of one's beloved as a beautiful flower seems to find little favour among the valentine composers of today, for whom cats and rabbits are evidently more evocative than roses and violets!

Another small group involves names based on traditional fantasy or legendary characters, such as *Fairy*, *Fluff Fairy*, *Pixie*, *Dragon*, *Phoenix*, *Pegasus* and *Aladdin*. These can be grouped with a much larger set inspired by fictional or media characters, mostly ones intended primarily to appeal to children, which range from old favourites such as *Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio*, *Milly Molly Mandy*, *Pooh Bear* and *the Mad Hatter* to those whose fame derives from film, television or cartoon exposure, like *Wonder Woman*, *Superman*, *007*, *Darthvader*, *Wilby Wonka*, *E.T.*, *Supergran*, *Miss Piggy*, *Bugs Bunny*, *Yogi*, *Boo Boo*, *Mr. Greedy*, *Womble* and *Fred Bassett*. The wealth of such examples reveals again the tendency for lovers' NNs to carry connotation of childhood. Finally, to these media creations may be added some others based on trade names; these include *Fisher Price girl*, *Bendi Toy* (these two, being based on names of toys, may also be related to the childhood theme), *E Type*, *Peugeot Man*, and *B.M.W.* (which might be metaphors proper, evoking a certain image, or cases of metonymy, whereby individuals are identified by the cars they drive, or perhaps would like to drive). Whatever their precise interpretations, the popularity

of media – and trade-name-inspired NNs can be considered to reflect the impact of such sources of images, and again seems in keeping with the generally anti-romantic tendency we have already observed in other sets of names.

There remains a miscellaneous set of NNs composed of names of mostly concrete inanimate objects, for which possible metaphorical interpretations may be more or less obvious. These are as diverse as the following sample: *Sunshine*, *Moonbeams*, *Settee*, *Bedspring*, *Wheelnut*, *Rucksack*, *Boiler*, *Tuppence*, and *Brown Bag*. There seems no point in speculating on the origins of these, many of which may have been inspired by individuals' own specific experiences. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the very fact that such NNs are likely to remain obscure to outsiders may enhance their value as signals of intimacy for their users.

It is also worth looking closely at some of the formal features of NNs which could be considered to contribute something to their expressive impact. Many NNs seem to be constructed through a process of elaboration whereby various expressive elements may be added to a root. For instance, certain suffixes, some of which seem classifiable as diminutives (*-y/-ie*, *-kin*, *-let*) while others are of indeterminate meaning (*-o*, *-s*, *-bod*), are extensively exploited and seem to add an extra note of affection or childishness. We find *-y/-ie* particularly widely used; it is found attached to proper names (*Jonesy*, *Bobsy*, *Chrissie*, *Marky Poo*), nouns (*Pesty*, *Hunky*, *Wolfie*), adjectives (*Cutie*, *Pinky*, *Goody*) and various other morphemes of indeterminate category status (*Scooby*, *Miffy*). The peculiar popularity of this suffix in forming nicknames, and its contribution to making words sound acceptable when used vocatively, is discussed in Davies (1986). Similar effects seem to be achieved through the use of *-o* (*Cheeko*, *Wacko*, *Fabbo*, *Fatso*) and *-s*, which seems particularly popular with a root which itself has no clear meaning (*Tonks*, *Googles*, *Toots*, *Scrumps*, *Chubbs*) and attached to forms which are themselves compounds (*Bunglepups*, *Kinnypigs*, *Wallybags*). Moreover, it is commonly used together with other suffixes yielding a form where the diminutive or affective tone is particularly pronounced; thus we find *-kin* + *-s* (*Smoochkins*), *-y/-ie* + *-kin* + *-s* (*Susiekins*, *Kattykins*), *-o* + *-kin* + *-s* (*Jimbokins*) and *-ie* + *-bod* + *-s* (*Duckiebods*, *Dickiebods*). The possibilities for such suffix combinations are examined by Poynton (1984), who claims that "there would seem to be an inverse relationship between the degree of recursion and the range of situations within which such forms may be used appropriately, such that maximally recursive forms are only used to an extremely small number of addressees with whom one has an on-going intimate relationship (probably only *spouse/lover*, children and possibly siblings and a few extremely close friends) and even then only in interactions not accessible to outsiders." (Poynton 1984:23). There would certainly seem to be some truth in this claim, in that the more elaborate combinations of suffixes suggest extreme intimacy, although we are here examining a rather exceptional situation where such private names are actually made 'accessible to outsiders'. It might be interesting to carry out a more controlled investigation of Poynton's claim by asking people to judge the degrees of intimacy associated with different forms.

There are other ways of elaborating the form of a name, besides that of adding

diminutive suffixes. Complex names, made out of more than one word, are often held together by means of phonological patterning, such as alliteration (*Piggy Paul, Nicky Noonos, Dinky-Doo-Doo, Rainy Roo, Karen Cuddles Kelly, Monster Mummy Mugwump*), assonance (*Scatty Kathy, Jilie Cool, Modgie Botty*) or rhyme (*Honey Bunny, Fabi Abi, Podge Rog, Brum the Bum*). These patterns are frequently used to create a reduplicative effect, where one or other of the two parts of the name (or occasionally both parts) may appear to be semantically empty but is used to echo the other part, thereby creating an elaborate phonological pattern: *Podgy Wodgy, Ducky Wucky, Tobbie Wobbie, Bonkie Tonks, Chicky Chick, Bing Bong, Mee Mee, Niff Niff*. It is noticeable that many of these elaborated names resemble those commonly used to address babies and small children. As Poynton noted, lovers and children are the two types of individual most likely to receive elaborate pet names, but the parallels do deeper than this, as we suggested earlier in proposing a general principle to the effect that people tend to portray their lovers as babies or small children. It can now be seen that connotations of babyhood can be suggested either through the content of the name, using morphemes suggesting smallness, diminutives, or characters associated with children, or through the form of the name, by making it reminiscent of babytalk. A more systematic study of the parallels between the pet names given to lovers and those given to children would certainly be interesting.

The technique of elaboration, through the piling up of expressive elements, is also evident in the use of vocatives and signatures consisting of longer phrases rather than single words. For instance, we often find a FN or NN accompanied by adjectives, possessive pronouns, or appositive NPs which add to the expressive force of the whole. Vocatives, for instance, may contain conventional terms of endearment such as *darling* or *dearest*, indications of the relationship between addressee and sender, with its attendant connotations (and the theme of babyhood crops up here too, as in (30)), or the first person possessive which likewise signals the sender's involvement with and claim to the addressee. The resulting descriptions are sometimes quite long-winded and loaded with expressive meaning.

- (29) *My wife, Connie, in our 58th year of loving marriage. Thank you.*
 (30) *Davy Baby, Wishing you were all mine. Love Dee Dee.*
 (31) *My darling wife Kim, I love you "and always will", all my love. Trevor.*
 (32) *To my sparkling bumpkin Jacqueline. Lots of love dear, Michael the Bully.*
 (33) *My Little Fruit Bat I love you so much. Smelly XXX.*
 (34) *Gingi My Lovely Cuddlebum your Cheeko.*
 (35) *Gina My cheek bum dearest Valentine, Bill.*
 (36) *Dawn, my old treacle pudding, I'll love you forever.*

Similar strategies are also evident in signatures, where modifiers may signal either

the sender's feelings for the addressee, as in (37) and (38), or perhaps the way the sender feels he or she is viewed by the addressee, as in (39) and (40). The possessive pronoun, this time in the second person, is exploited here too.

- (37) *Buno, Your always love Lopy.*
 (38) *Michael, the complete your loving Toerag.*
 (39) *Jenny, please make my halo slip again and again, love from your little Ange.*
 (40) *Sweetest Sooty, All my love, from your darling Chipmunk.*
 (41) *To eight bloody years and I still love you from your star hubby.*

In contrast, endearments used alone are rare both as vocatives and as signatures, although we come across the occasional example like the following:

- (42) *Darling, you are my everything.*
 (43) *My valentine, i love you.*
 (44) *My love, home is being together where our hearts beat as one.*

The infrequency of such examples is undoubtedly due to the fact that, while they may be effective as expressions of feeling, they are inadequate as identifications.

It can be seen from the above survey that the expressive impact of vocatives and signatures is often achieved through a process of elaboration whereby several distinct elements, whether morphemes or words, are combined together, leading to a piling up of emotive signals. This tendency may be encouraged by the particular nature of valentine messages, which are after all prepared in advance, could be considered to constitute a kind of ritual declaration of love, and may thus be felt to call for more elaboration than the labels used between lovers in other circumstances, for instance in spontaneous conversation.

There is also another way in which the labels assigned to sender and addressee in these valentines can be used to express the relationship between the two. In a surprising number of cases, the names used can be considered to have a symbolic value, in that the closeness of the links between sender and addressee is seen to be signalled through a link of some kind between the names used to refer to these two.

For example, the names adopted may be those of two characters normally thought of as a pair, as in the following:

- (45) *Sweep, I love you. Sooty.*
 (46) *Yogi, BooBoo forever. PS 38.*

or they may be the names of two entities which are characteristically found together, or which belong to the same domain:

- (47) *Fixed interest, All my love, Portfolio.*
 (48) *To the Gardener from Passion Flower with love.*

(49) *Spanner, I'll love you forever, yours Nuts.*

The message in some cases may be even richer, if we take into account, for instance, our knowledge of how a gardener's role is to tend flowers, or how spanner and nuts are designed to interlock harmoniously. A similar kind of significance could be seen in the following:

(50) *To a frog from a frog-eating slob.*

(51) *To the bird from the worm with love.*

In other cases the connection is not merely referential, but also semantic, in that the two NNs share some semantic features. Animal pairs are particularly frequent; we find *Frog/Toad*, *Dog/cat*, *Foxy/Wolf*, *Rat/Mouse*, *Gunnipig (sic)/Hamster* and *Ratty/Hammy*.

Other cases involve a formal parallelism. These include cases where a particular word or morpheme is included in both NNs, as in the pairs *Pink Duck/Pink Pig*, *Toad/Sammytoad*, *Smartarse/Sillyarse*, *Istiboo/Booboo*, *Susiekins/Martikins*, *Lynnesky/Edsky*, *Pixie Cutkins/Pixie Bobkins*, *Babymunchkins/Little Munchkins*, *Mr Piggles/Mrs Piggles* and *Dady Mugwump/Monster Mummy Mugwump*. In the last few examples in this list, it seems plausible to talk of a name shared between the two partners, who then differentiate themselves by attaching different titles or modifiers to this. This adoption of a common nickname (which of course has its more official counterpart in the custom whereby women adopt their husbands' surnames) could be seen as the ultimate linguistic symbol of solidarity and identification of each with the other. As well as the above cases, where the distinction is still made through an individual label accompanying the joint one, there are instances where the distinction is made only by numbering:

(52) *To kisses I your my everything from Kisses.*

(53) *Loopy 1. Happy Valentine's Day baby, champayne to celebrate. Loopy 2.*

In others the only difference is a slight elaboration in one case:

(54) *Podge. Want to play hunt the Andrex? Podgey.*

(55) *Spam, loves you lots, Spammy.*

Finally, there are cases where no distinction is made at all:

(56) *Babe. Huv you lunny bunch. Babe.*

(57) *Pudding, I love you, stars, Christmas trees, Wellingtons and everythings. Pudding.*

In still other cases, the link between the two individuals is symbolised through a parallelism at the level of phonology. For instance, there are quite a number of cases in our sample where sender and addressee are assigned names which rhyme: *Ratty/Matty*, *Grumpy/Stumpy*, *Bimbo/Timbo*, *Snuggly/Buggly*. Other pairs of names

are related through assonance, consonance or pararhyme (using these terms in the sense given them by Leech 1969:89), as in *Muffin/Puddin*, *Scrumps/Snugs* and *Snuggle/Snaggle*, while the pair *Dom/Mod* might be considered to exhibit metathesis. Finally, a pair of names may be linked through the fact that they are both constructed on the same pattern, as with the reduplicative names in the following messages:

(58) *Bunny-Wunny loves his Neeny-Weeny. Werry much indeed.*

(59) *Dearest Fo-Fo, love always, Boo-Boo.*

(60) *Lip-Lop, my best friend, love always, Nip-Nop.*

Altogether we identified 33 instances of such linked pairs of labels.

Conclusion

The material examined in this paper poses certain problems to the investigator. Although the messages themselves are easily accessible to anyone who wishes to examine them, their significance can certainly only really be assessed by their senders and receivers. The outsider who is curious enough to examine these publicly displayed intimacies is not in a position to make very conclusive interpretations. The full impact and tone of a message may depend on many things of which we can have no knowledge; for instance, we cannot know if a particular NN is habitually used by the participants or newly coined, nor can we guess at the peculiar associations it may have for its users, and indeed we may not be sure whether certain labels are nicknames or first names. Despite these problems, however, I have ventured to attempt certain generalisations about the strategies adopted in exploiting vocatives and signatures in this sample.

I hope to have shown some parallels between the communicative functions of vocatives and those of signatures. Both may serve the purpose of identifying their referents and/or that of signalling the relationship between sender and addressee and the attitudes of one towards the other. The intimate nature of the messages is reflected in the way each of these purposes is achieved. With regard to the first, it has been noted that in the vast majority of cases the identification provided is effective only for the two participants; there is a very strong tendency to avoid making the identity of sender and addressee clear to people outside the couple. The identity of the addressee is also often more clearly signalled than that of the sender, for reasons we have discussed. As for the second function, the expression of feelings would seem perhaps by definition to be an essential goal of valentine messages, and the examples we have surveyed reveal the extent to which vocatives and signatures are exploited as tools for this purpose.

The two goals of identification and expression of feeling, together with the particular context of press valentines, have been shown to influence the types of label used in our sample. The scarcity of labels consisting of a conventional term of endearment alone (e.g. *darling*) can be explained in terms of their inadequacy as

identifying labels, while the frequency with which NNs are used could be traced to the fact that these are generally effective as both identifiers and expressives. Finally, certain strategies seem especially favoured as means of expressing intimacy and affection. The most noteworthy in this sample include the use of forms suggesting that the loved one is perceived as a baby or young child, and the tendency to favour descriptions which appear derogatory or teasing. Also interesting is the use of various strategies of elaboration which may make the expressive impact of a label more emphatic. It would be interesting to compare material of the type considered here with that from other sources, such as that used by lovers in other circumstances or at periods of time. This might shed light upon the question of whether press valentines can be considered to have their own special conventions for using vocatives and signatures.

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