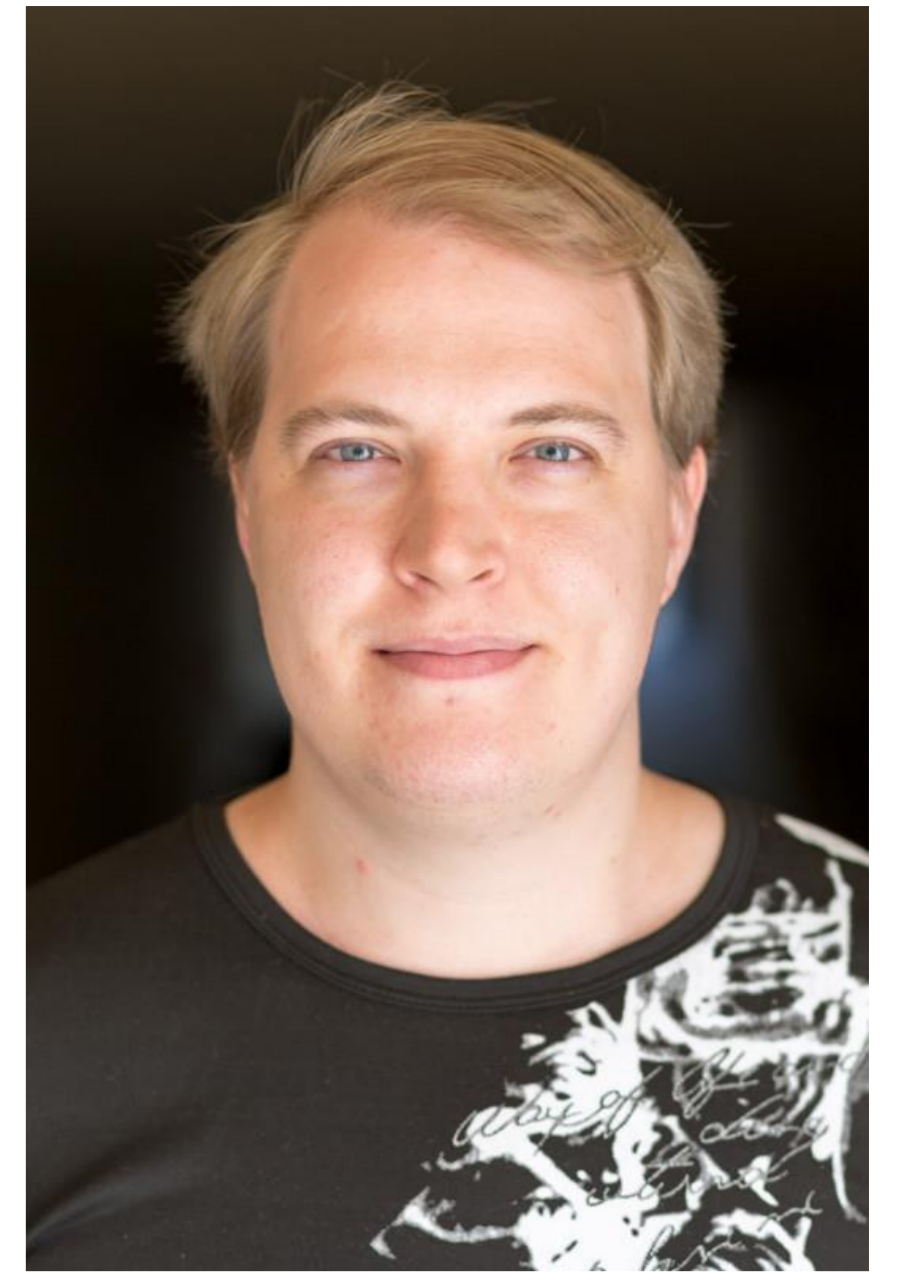




A PhD Thesis: NAMES ON THE INTERNET

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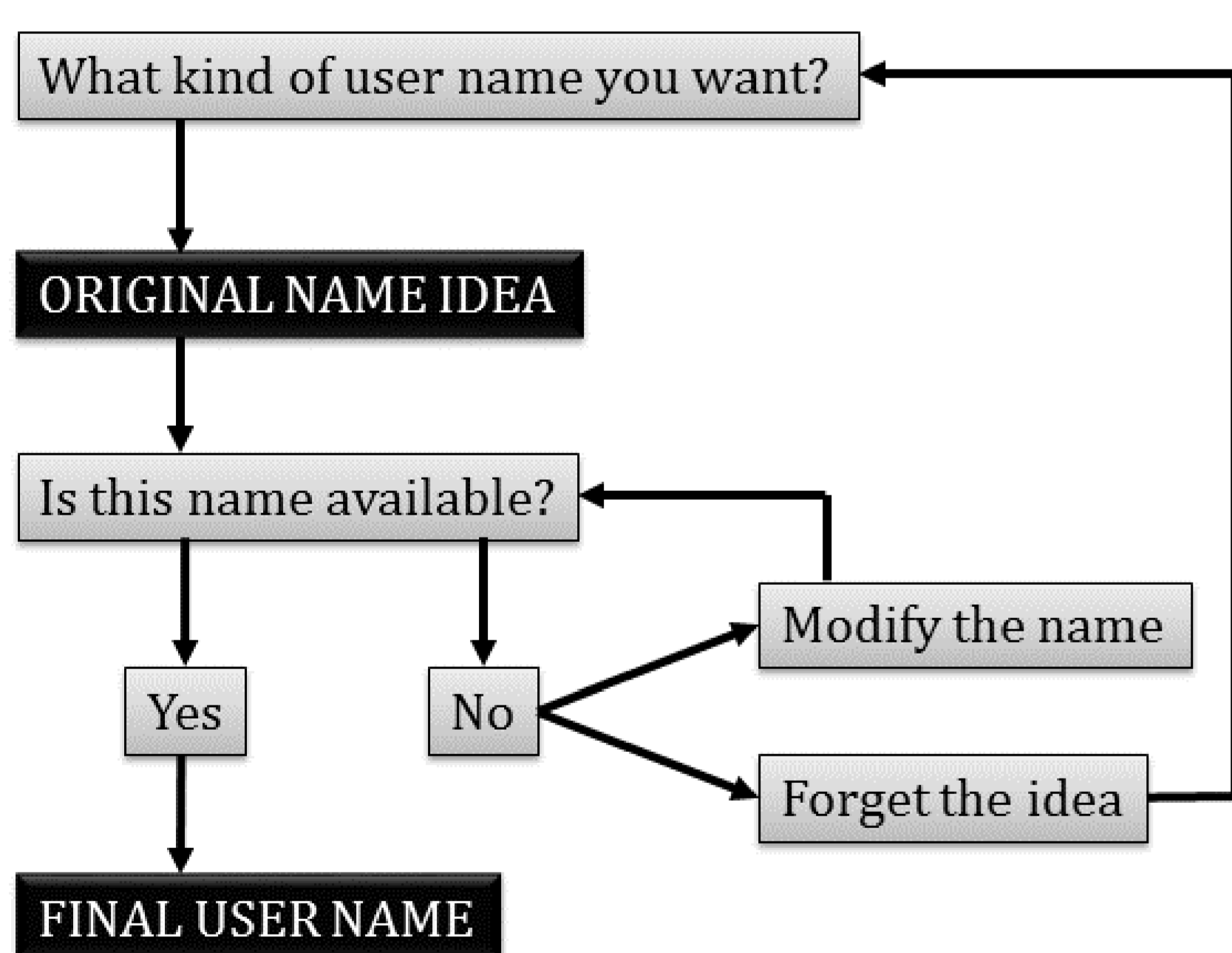
Internet has tremendously changed the ways of communication, and also the language we use. My PhD thesis examines this change from an onomastic point of view, analysing two categories of proper names on the internet: user names and level names. The thesis consists of four articles:

1) USER NAMES IN FINNISH ONLINE COMMUNITIES

In many websites, people are known by their user names. We can choose the user name ourselves, so it is a great chance to express our identity. However, names cannot be very long and each name must be unique. This could cause problems with choosing a name, especially in large communities.

User names have been a subject of scholarly studies since 1990s, yet the big picture of them has remained unclear. This article gives a comprehensive overview to the name category using the data of 7,600 names collected from three Finnish online communities.

The focus is on structure and semantics of user names: What kind of elements do they consist of? How is it possible to create a unique name in a community of millions of users? The study also presents a process of creating a user name (picture 1), based on more than 300 stories behind actual user names.



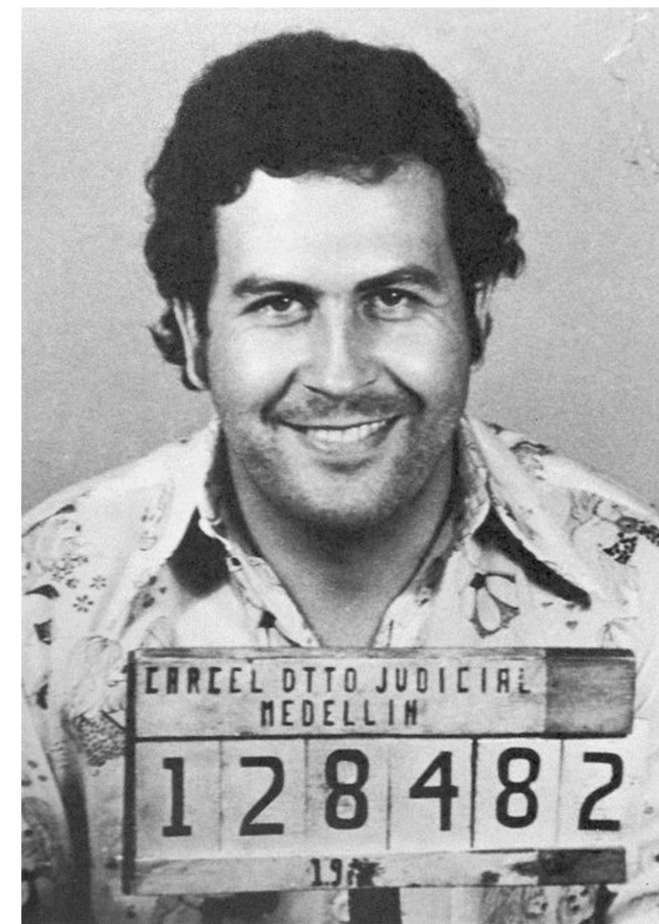
2) USER NAMES OF ILLEGAL DRUG VENDORS ON A DARKNET CRYPTOMARKET

Illegal drug trade is moving from streets to online. Deals are made on *darknet cryptomarkets*, anonymous Ebay-like marketplaces, where the most successful vendors earn millions of euros annually.

This study examines user names of illegal drug vendors and contrasts them to both user names on the public internet and commercial names in non-virtual world. The data, 762 names, are from AlphaBay, the largest cryptomarket in early 2017.

Many user names share information of the

vendors, referring for example to their products and home country. Vendor names also create various images. Some names create an image of a normal, legal business by using typical company and brand name vocabulary or by plagiarising famous brand names. Other vendors, on the contrary, even highlight their criminality. They use vocabulary referring to illegal activities, for example *pirate*, *bandit*, *cartel* and *mafia*. Many vendors are also inspired by well-known real-life or fictional drug criminals, such as Pablo Escobar (picture 2) or Jesse Pinkman and Walter White from TV series *Breaking Bad* (picture 3).



3) LEVEL NAMES IN AN ONLINE MINIGOLF GAME

Video games often consist of several separate spaces, called *levels*. Giving names to those levels is an important part of creating a video game, yet it has been overlooked in previous onomastic or game studies literature.

This study analyses over 2,000 level names from *Playforia Minigolf* (2002), an online virtual minigolf game. Those names are also compared to several other proper name categories, such as rural and urban toponymy, artwork names and internet user names.

A majority (70%) of level names in *Playforia Minigolf* are based on either levels' elements, appearance or playing it. Those names that are not linked to levels' characteristics (30%) include references to popular culture, respected players of the game and level designers' personal interests, as well as self-invented words. An essential part of the name system are *level series*, sets of levels named in a same manner. Level names have something in common with several name categories but do not especially resemble any of them.

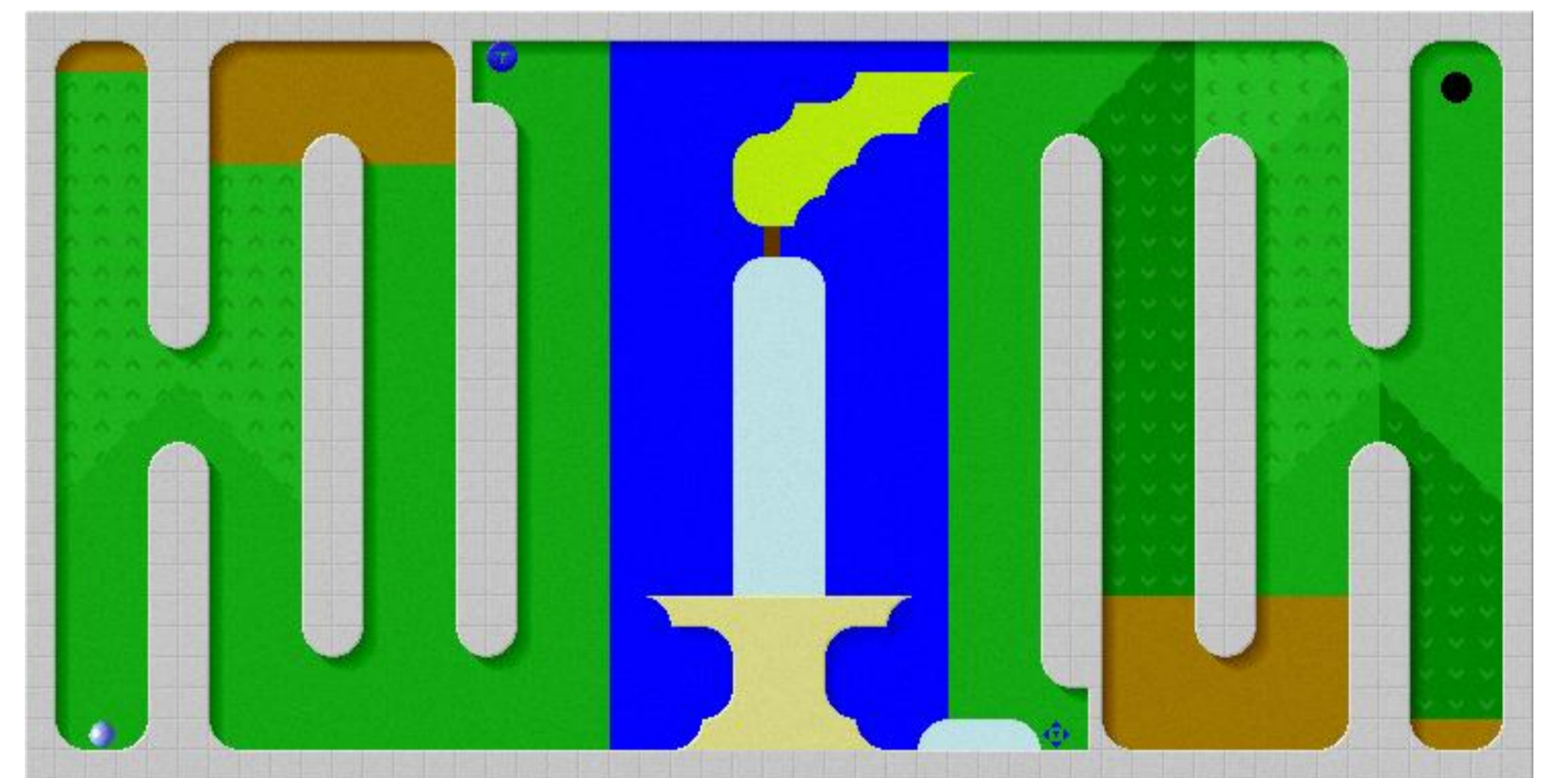
4) CANDLE IN THE WIND: MEMORABILITY OF NAMES

Remembering proper names is important but sometimes difficult. But what kind of names are easy or difficult to remember?

In this article, the *memorability* of names is analysed with an empirical test data. 33 hobbyists of *Playforia Minigolf* participated two experiments testing how well they can remember level names of the game.

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, I recognised several factors that influence the memorability: the connection between level's name and characteristics, belonging to a level series, language and length of the name, and the level's importance for the gameplay. In other words, the memorability of a name consists of several factors.

The most remembered name in the tests was *Candle in the wind* (picture 4), which refers both to level's appearance and the famous song by Elton John.



SUMMARY

Names on the internet are different but also similar to names in the non-virtual world. Sometimes real-life names clearly have been used as a model for online names.

Characteristic for both user names and level names is that each name must be unique. Perhaps this reflects the individualism of our time.

Internet is a vast, heterogeneous environment. There are lots of differences between proper names on different websites. Lots of further research are needed before we can make conclusions of names on the internet as a whole.

PUBLICATIONS

Article 1 was published in Finnish in *Virittäjä* 120 pp. 398–422. Shortened English version will be published in *Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica* in 2018.

Article 2 will be published in *Onoma* in 2018. See also [poster](#).

Article 3 will be published in *Onomastica Uralica* (ICOS2017 proceedings) in 2018.

Article 4 will be published in Finnish in *Sananjalka* in 2018. English version is under planning.