

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Personal Naming in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to better understand the sociolinguistic factors that affect personal naming in Jordan by looking at five specific factors that affect it: religious, cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality. It examines how these five factors affect the personal naming in respect to gender, generation, and geographical distribution in Jordan. The study also seeks to determine which of the five factors are the most and which are the least influential for naming practices in Jordan. To this end, 300 names were collected and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, with the results showing that these factors affect gender, generation, and geographical distribution in different ways. It also showed that the religious factor is the most frequent, whereas, the political factor is the least.

Key words: Sociolinguistic Factors, Personal Naming, Names, Personal Names, Jordanian Names

INTRODUCTION

Naming is the process of labeling people, things, or objects. "Naming is in reality a process of labeling persons or places whereby some meanings or concepts are poured into a linguistic form permissible by the phonological, morphological as well as the semantic rules of a given language system" (Al-Quran & Al-Azzam, 2014, p. 103). These labels are called names and are words that carry linguistic features. A name is "a word or combination of words, such as boy, referring to persons, beings, subjects or objects" (Ainiyala et al, 2012, p. 13). As words, names may identify people or things.

One type of name is personal. This type of names refers to the nouns that identify people. Personal name nouns are a sub-component of proper nouns (Azieb & Qudah, 2018). Personal names are chosen based on many sociolinguistic factors, including identity, religion, ideology, politics, history, family, and the musicality of the name (Şahin, 2017; Azieb & Qudah, 2018).

Religion is a common factor, with research finding a correlation between personal names and religion (e.g., see Copeman, 2015). For example, people may give their children the names of the Prophets of their religion, such as *Zakaria* for a Christian or a Muslim in India (Sharma, 2020) and *Jibiril* from the Quran and *Abraham* from the Bible (Gemechu & Tegegne, 2017).

Another important naming factor is culture. In Hausa society, for example, the choice of personal names is affected by their Arabic culture (Salihu, 2014). Children in the Wollo Muslim *Amhara* culture are also given Arabic names such as *Ahmad* (Hassen, 2016) despite the fact that the culture of

Amhara has been Christianized. In other words, what could appear to be naming based on religious factors is actually naming based on culture, as the name Ahmad is brought from Islam. This is a clear example of Arabized culture affecting personal naming.

Personal naming is also influenced by the political situation. For example, in many countries, the choice of given names can be affected by the names of current political leaders or the desire to choose a name that has a particular political implication. For example, the *Amhara* people in Ethiopia give their children names with political meaning, like *Moosisaa* 'enabling to win' and *Mootii* 'king' (ibid, 2016).

Musicality is another key factor that names seem to be based on. Musicality refers to the state in which the name sounds rhythmic or may even rhyme. These names may share one or more similar sound and may have one different sound that distinguishes them from another name. Examples of this type of names are *Lina* and *Dina* (Azieb & Al-Qudah, 2018).

Naming children after a relative or someone close, such as a fraternal grandfather or grandmother or a maternal grandfather or grandmother, is another factor, and this is particularly used to name the firstborn (Bramwell, 2012). This factor indicates the importance of the family's older members by giving a firstborn child the same name.

Jordanian personal names provide an interesting source for the analysis of these naming factors, as the choice of names in the Jordanian society has been influenced by historical, political, religious, and social events (Al-Qawasmī & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2016). The present study analyzes five specific factors that affect personal naming in Jordan: religious,

cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality. The study will look at the way these five factors affect the personal naming in Jordan in respect to gender, generation, and geographical distribution. This study will also seek to determine which of the five factors are the most and which are the least influential for personal naming in Jordan.

The current study considers the following questions:

1. How do the five sociolinguistic factors (religious, cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality) affect personal naming in Jordan?
2. Which of these sociolinguistic factors has the most and which has the least influence on personal naming in Jordan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personal naming has been analyzed by a number of researchers for several purposes. Some of these studies have focused on the factors that affect personal names, while others have explored these factors in respect to generation and translation.

Researchers have analyzed the various aspects affecting the way people choose names include Al Zumor (2009), who studied the sociocultural and sociolinguistic implications of Yemeni female names. He concluded that the social and cultural aspects influenced the naming practices. Similarly, Al-Qawasmī and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2016) studied a number of sociolinguistic factors (i.e., historical, religious, and social) that affect the naming of male and female newborns in Jordan over a period of time. They found that the naming choices were influenced differently over time, with cultural, religious and social aspects influencing naming are the most in the seventies, while social and urbanized modern aspects are what influenced naming during the eighties and nineties, with globalization and cultural factors being influential by the beginning of the two-thousands.

Other researchers have analyzed naming among different generations. Azieb and Qudah (2018) investigated the factors that affect the naming practice for males and females of different generations in Jijel, a province in Algeria. They concluded that the naming practice focuses on religious, cultural, and family factors in the older generation for both genders, while the naming practice focuses on the religious factor for both genders in the middle-aged generation. Religious factors also affected the younger generation, and the desire to be fashionable influenced the naming practice of females in the younger generation. Additionally, Aljbour and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2019) analyzed feminine personal names among a Jordanian tribe. They tried to determine the sociolinguistic implications of the names and the differences in the naming practices among three generations of females by analyzing the aspects that influence their naming. They concluded that the naming practice among the three generations is influenced by the change of lifestyle.

Al-Quran and Al-Azzam (2014) studied the multifarious social and cultural allusions and translation aspects that influence Jordanian names. They analyzed the regional, religious, political, romantic, and other social backgrounds of their participants. They found that conservative families

tended to name their sons after grandparents, while the young fathers tended to name their children after borrowed characters or socially unfavorable persons. The study also emphasized that the translation is a complicated process that is affected by these factors.

Most previous studies that analyzed personal names have focused on the analysis of the factors that affect the choice of personal nouns. While some of these studies have considered these factors in relation to gender and generation, the present study attempts to further increase the understanding of naming factors by considering gender, generation, and geographical distribution. Moreover, it seeks to determine the most and the least influential factors that affect the personal naming in Jordan, as this will contribute to the knowledge of naming factors affecting Jordanian names.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the aims of the study, the researchers developed a questionnaire to collect the Jordanian names of three generations from three geographical areas: *Amman*, *Karak*, and *Irbid*. The total number of collected names is 300, 150 male names and 150 female names. These names were classified into three generations:

- male and female young generation (the names of people aged 1 day-19 years old)
- male and female middle generation (the names of people aged 20-40 years old)
- male and female older generation (the names of people aged 41 years old and above).

The researchers applied both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Qualitative analysis was used to identify the factors and the way they affect personal naming in Jordan in respect to gender, generation, and geographical distribution. Quantitative analysis was used to determine the most and the least influential factors affecting personal naming in Jordan. The researchers determined the factors by looking at the names and classifying them into five factors religious, cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality based on their understanding of the meaning of these names.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

There are a number of factors that appear to affect the personal naming in Jordan with respect to gender, geographical distribution, and generation. These factors are religious, cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality. The analysis found that 85 names were chosen based on religious factors, 70 were based on cultural factors, 23 on political factors, 54 on naming after someone, and 56 on musicality factors.

The Religious Factor

Table 1 below shows the way the religious factor affects names. The total number of religious names was 85 out of 300. 56 of these were male and 29 were female names. The religious factor appears to be more common in the older male generation, with 21 out of the 56 male religious names

found here. With the 85 names distributed geographically, the data in *Irbid* (20 names) and *Karak* (23 names) suggest that males in those areas are more than twice as likely to be named by religious factors than females. On the other hand, in Amman, while more males were also named using religious factors, there was much less difference between the genders (13 males and 10 females).

The Cultural Factor

The impact of the cultural factor on naming was found to affect 70 of all names, as shown in Table 2. In respect to gender, this factor appears to influence the naming of females more than males, with 43 female names compared to 27 male. Of the 70 names based on the cultural factor, both the male and female older generations used this factor the most, with 14 male and 31 female names. What is particularly interesting about the generation distribution is that the young and middle generations (especially the young) showed little, and sometimes no, cultural naming. Geographically, the cultural factor is high in *Karak*, where 15 out of 27 male names and 23 out of 43 female names are culture-based. Surprisingly, the total number of cultural names in *Karak* (38) is more than the half of the total number. The next highest number is found in *Irbid*, with 18 out of 70, and the least is in *Amman*, with 14 out of 70.

The Political Factor

Table 3 shows that the political factor affected 23 out of 300 names. Male names tended to be most influenced by this factor, with 20 names based on political figures or situations, compared to only 3 female names. In respect to generation, the highest numbers are found among children and young males (young and middle-aged generations), where 18 out of 20 male names are used. With regard to the regional distribution, the numbers seem to be almost equal in *Amman* and *Karak* among both genders and higher in *Irbid*. However the number of the names based on this factor is high in *Irbid*, it does not include any female names.

Naming-after-someone Factor

Table 4 below shows the distribution of the naming after someone factor, which affected 54 out of 300 names. 35 of these 54 names were male, showing that this factor influenced male names more than female names. However, this factor was almost equal for young and middle-aged male generations and young and older female generations. The regional distribution affected by this factor was dominant in the *Amman* area for both males and females, with 19 out of 35 male names and 11 out of 19 female names based on the naming after someone factor. The area that was affected the least by this factor is *Karak*, with only 6 names based on this factor.

Table 1. Religious factor naming by gender, generation and geographical area in Jordan ($n=85$)

Geographical Area	Male Generations			Totals	Female Generations			Totals
	1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above		1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above	
Amman	7	3	3	13	4	6	0	10
Irbid	6	4	10	20	2	4	3	9
Karak	7	8	8	23	6	1	3	10
Totals	20	15	21	56 (65.8%)	12	11	6	29 (34.1%)

Table 2. Cultural factor naming by gender, generation and geographical area in Jordan ($n=70$)

Geographical Area	Male Generations			Totals	Female Generations			Totals
	1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above		1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above	
Amman	0	1	5	6	0	0	8	8
Irbid	3	2	1	6	0	0	12	12
Karak	0	7	8	15	4	8	11	23
Totals	3	10	14	27 (38.5%)	4	8	31	43 (61.4%)

Table 3. Political factor naming by gender, generation and geographical area in Jordan ($n=23$)

Geographical Area	Male Generations			Totals	Female Generations			Totals
	1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above		1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above	
Amman	4	1	0	5	0	2	0	2
Irbid	2	6	2	10	0	0	0	0
Karak	4	1	0	5	0	1	0	1
Totals	10	8	2	20 (86.9%)	0	3	0	3 (13.0%)

Table 4. Naming after someone factor naming by gender, generation and geographical area in Jordan ($n=54$)

Geographical Area	Male Generations			Totals	Female Generations			Totals
	1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above		1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above	
Amman	6	6	7	19	4	2	5	11
Irbid	2	5	4	11	2	5	0	7
Karak	3	1	1	5	0	0	1	1
Totals	11	12	12	35 (64.8%)	6	7	6	19 (35.18%)

Table 5. Musicality factor naming by gender, generation and geographical area in Jordan ($n=68$)

Geographical Area	Male Generations			Totals	Female Generations			Totals
	1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above		1 day-20 years	20-40 years	41 years and above	
Amman	0	3	1	4	9	7	3	19
Irbid	5	0	0	5	8	8	1	17
Karak	3	0	0	3	11	7	2	17
Totals	8	3	1	12 (17.6%)	28	22	6	56 (82.3%)

Table 6. Frequency of naming factors in Jordan

Factor	Frequency	Number of names	Percentage
Religious	1	85	28.33%
Cultural	2	70	23.33%
Musicality	3	68	23
After-someone	4	54	18%
Political	5	23	8%
Total	--	300	100%

The Musicality Factor

Of all names analyzed, there were 68 that were affected by the musicality factor, as shown in Table 5 below. The gender distribution shows that many more female names were affected by this factor, with 56 female compared to only 12 male names. In regard to generation, the highest numbers were found among young females, with 28 out of 56 of the female names affected by this factor. Least influenced by this factor was older female names, with only 6. In terms of geographical distribution, it was found that the musicality factor was high for females in all areas, with 19 out of 56 in *Amman*, 17 out of 56 in *Irbid*, and 17 out of 56 in *Karak*.

The analyses above show that these five factors (religious, cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality) affect the naming practice in Jordan in the following way. In the case of gender, male names are highly influenced by the religious, political, and naming after someone factors, while female names are more influenced by the cultural and musicality factors.

In the case of generations, the religious factor mostly affects the older male generation, while the cultural factor appears more clearly among the older female generation. The political factor appears to be found more in the young and middle-aged male generations, and naming after someone is found among all male generations. Finally, the musicality factor is found more among the young female generation.

In the case of regional distribution, the religious factor is high in *Karak*. This could be explained by the fact that *Karak* has many religious places and tombs that people visit, which might inspire their naming decisions. Examples like *Zaid* in *Karak* show the influence of the names of religious people whose tombs are there. The cultural factor is high in *Irbid* and *Karak*, while the lowest number is found in *Amman*. It appears that the less civilized the city, the more the cultural factor can be associated with naming. The political factor is used more in the personal naming of people in *Irbid*. The naming after someone and the musicality factors are high in *Amman*. The naming after someone factor is likely high in this area because people of many different nationalities live here, and those nationalities tend to be characterized by strong social ties and an emphasis on respect for older family members, such as parents and ancestors, including naming their children after their grandfathers. In the case of the musicality factor also being high in *Amman*, this could be due to the implication that people in civilized cities value what they perceive as more prestigious and modern names.

Table 6 shows the frequency of each factor impacting personal naming in Jordan.

As demonstrated in Table 6, the religious factor is the most frequent, with 85 (28.3%) of names being chosen based on this factor. The next most frequent factors for naming in Jordan were cultural (with 70, or 23.3% of names) and musicality (with 68, or 23% of the names). These factors likely show a similar frequency because the majority of names affected by this factor are female names associated with the past and now. In the past, parents used to name girls based on the occasion that they experience (e.g., *falha*, on the occasion of the harvest season). These names are culturally associated, whereas now they are more musical (e.g., *Lara* and *Yara*). The after-someone factor influences 54 (18%) of the names. The least influential factor is political, with only 23 (8%) of the names were chosen due to this factor.

CONCLUSION

The present study analyzed the sociolinguistic factors affecting personal naming in Jordan. The researchers analyzed five factors that affect personal naming in Jordan: religious, cultural, political, naming after someone, and musicality. They tried to determine the way these factors affected gender, generation, and geographical distribution in Jordan as well as which factors had the most and the least influence on the choice of personal names in Jordan. The analysis showed that gender, generation, and geographical distribution were affected by the five naming factors, with male names highly influenced by the religious, political, and naming after someone factors, while female names were more influenced by the cultural and musicality factors. In addition, the religious factor appeared to have more effect on the male older generation, the cultural factor had more effect on the older female generation, and the political factor affected more young and middle-aged generations. The naming after someone factor was found among all male generations, and the musicality factor was found more among female children, the young female generation. Additionally, the results showed that the order of frequency of these factors from most frequent to least frequent is religious, cultural and musicality, naming after someone, and political.

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