

The Role of Personal Names in Social and Ethnic Contexts: A Socio-Onomastic Approach

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the analysis of the role and functional characteristics of personal names in social and ethnic contexts from a socio-onomastic perspective. In the study, personal names are interpreted not only as means of identification, but also as symbolic markers that encode social status, cultural affiliation, and ethnic identity. The article examines the relationship between naming practices and social factors, and demonstrates that the semantic and pragmatic properties of names are closely interconnected with processes of social change. The findings of the study make it possible to consider personal names as an active semiotic system that reflects the cultural and social structure of society and participates in the formation of social identity.

Keywords: Personal names, socio-onomastics, anthroponyms, social context, ethnic identity, semantics, pragmatics.

Introduction: In the context of globalization and intensive social transformations, language functions as one of the key indicators of societal change. A particularly important role in this process is played by the system of personal names, as it is especially sensitive to cultural, social, and ethnic shifts. Proper names reflect not only an individual's affiliation with a particular culture or linguistic community, but also the social expectations, ideological orientations, and value systems of society.

Despite the active development of onomastic research, the majority of existing studies focus primarily on the etymological or historical analysis of names. As a result, the mechanisms through which personal names interact with social processes remain insufficiently explored. In this regard, the socio-onomastic approach has gained particular relevance, as it allows personal names to be examined within the framework of their social functioning. This approach views names as socially conditioned and functionally significant elements of the linguistic system, closely connected with issues of identity, social stratification, and cultural dynamics.

Relevance and Problem Statement

The dynamic development of society is clearly reflected

in the changes observed in personal names. Names function as markers of social stratification, cultural values, and ethnic consciousness. However, in much of the existing research, personal names are often interpreted as passive indicators of social processes. This article, by contrast, aims to conceptualize personal names as an active mechanism involved in the formation of social identity.

Accordingly, the central research problem is formulated as follows:

Through what mechanisms are the semantic and pragmatic properties of personal names connected to social and ethnic processes within society?

METHODOLOGY

Research Object and Subject

The object of the present study is the system of personal names (anthroponyms) that have developed in both historical and contemporary periods. Within the framework of this research, personal names are not viewed as autonomous linguistic units, but rather as linguistic phenomena closely interconnected with social and cultural processes. Accordingly, anthroponyms are analyzed as linguistic expressions of social stratification, cultural values, and ethnic identity

within society.

The subject of the research comprises the semantic, pragmatic, and symbolic characteristics of personal names as manifested in social and ethnic contexts, as well as their relationship with processes of social change. In particular, the study examines the role of social status, cultural capital, ethnic affiliation, and historical memory in the process of name selection.

Research Materials

The research materials include:

- personal names from different historical periods;
- naming traditions that vary across ethnic and cultural communities;
- onomastic examples documented in scholarly literature;
- findings from previous socio-onomastic studies.

The selection of materials was based on criteria such as the active use of names in social contexts, their degree of semantic transparency, and their capacity to express ethnic characteristics. This approach made it possible to generalize the findings and draw well-grounded theoretical conclusions.

Research Methods

The present study was conducted using a comprehensive methodological approach. The following methods were employed:

Socio-onomastic analysis

This method was used to identify the relationship between personal names and social factors. In particular, the analysis focused on the influence of parents' social status, level of education, cultural values, and ethnic affiliation on naming practices. Through this approach, personal names were interpreted as linguistic manifestations of social stratification.

Semantic analysis

Semantic analysis was applied to examine the lexical-semantic content of personal names, including both explicit and implicit meanings, as well as their positive or negative connotations. This method made it possible to demonstrate that names perform not only a nominative function, but also evaluative and symbolic functions.

Pragmatic analysis

The pragmatic approach explored how personal names are used in specific communicative situations and how they serve social relations and communicative intentions. Through this method, names were analyzed

as tools that structure interpersonal relationships in discourse.

Comparative-ethnic analysis

This method was employed to compare naming traditions across different ethnic groups. Comparative-ethnic analysis helped to clarify the role of personal names in expressing ethnic identity and their connection with national culture.

Etymological analysis

Etymological analysis focused on the origin, historical development, and semantic evolution of personal names. This method contributed to understanding names as carriers of historical memory and cultural heritage.

Discursive approach

Discursive analysis examined how personal names are linked to social discourse, ideological perspectives, and cultural narratives. This approach enabled the interpretation of names as active instruments in the formation of social consciousness and identity.

Significance of the Methodological Approach

The integrative use of multiple methods allowed personal names to be examined not merely as linguistic units, but as complex socio-cultural phenomena. As a result, the study conceptualizes personal names not as passive reflections of social and ethnic processes, but as an active semiotic system that participates in shaping and structuring social reality.

SOCIAL AND ETHNIC FUNCTIONS OF PERSONAL NAMES

Personal names function in the linguistic system not merely as nominative units, but as complex semiotic instruments that embody social and ethnic meanings. In contemporary socio-onomastic research, names are interpreted as important indicators reflecting the social structure of society, cultural values, and ethnic identity (Ainiala 2016; Kostanski & Puzey 2016; Sabet & Zhang 2020).

Social Functions of Personal Names

One of the primary social functions of personal names is social identification. A name enables the recognition and differentiation of an individual within a social group. However, as Van Langendonck (2007) emphasizes, personal names are not merely identifiers; they also function as carriers of social information. Through a name, it is often possible to infer an individual's social background, cultural orientation, and even social status.

Socio-onomastic studies demonstrate that naming practices are directly related to parents' social status, level of education, and cultural capital (Liebersson & Bell

1992; Lindsay & Dempsey 2017). For example, representatives of higher social strata tend to prefer traditional or relatively rare names, whereas popular and trend-driven names are more frequently found among lower social groups. This pattern indicates that personal names operate as symbolic instruments reflecting social stratification within society.

According to Nyström (2016), names possess symbolic meaning, and issues related to naming may, in certain contexts, acquire political or ideological significance. Consequently, the act of name selection is often associated with parents' attempts to position themselves within society or to symbolically express aspirations regarding their child's future social status. For instance, in contemporary societies influenced by global culture, newly emerging names are frequently perceived as symbols of modernity, openness, and cosmopolitan orientation.

Ethnic Functions of Personal Names

Personal names constitute a significant marker of ethnic identity. As Ainiala (2012) notes, names serve as instruments for preserving historical memory and cultural heritage within a society. Naming traditions characteristic of specific ethnic groups are transmitted across generations and contribute to the reinforcement of national and ethnic self-identification.

For example, in Uzbek naming practices, names such as Umriya and O'lmas are associated with ethno-psychological beliefs concerning a child's health and longevity, and their selection is grounded in traditional worldviews and folk beliefs. Similarly, names such as Norbibi and Anora are chosen in symbolic connection with physical characteristics observed at birth. These examples illustrate that the ethnic function of personal names extends beyond linguistic significance to encompass cultural and psychological dimensions.

Sabet and Zhang (2020) conceptualize names in ethnic contexts as "markers of social and cultural boundaries." According to their analysis, a personal name often immediately signals an individual's affiliation with a particular ethnic group, which plays a crucial role in social interaction. Likewise, in societies experiencing intensified migration processes, names may be selected either as a means of preserving ethnic identity or, conversely, as a strategy for adaptation to a new cultural environment.

Symbolic and Ideological Functions of Personal Names

Kostanski and Puzey (2016) interpret naming as a social and political act, arguing that personal names also reflect ideological changes within society. Through the choice of a name, parents may implicitly express

religious beliefs, national ideologies, or political orientations.

From this perspective, personal names function as a form of symbolic capital (Lindsay & Dempsey 2017). Certain names are positively evaluated within society and may signify social prestige or advantage, while others become associated with lower social status or stereotypical perceptions. This dynamic highlights the active role of personal names in shaping social relations and reinforcing ideological structures within society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that the process of name selection is directly influenced by social factors, particularly the level of education, cultural capital, and social stratification. Representatives of higher social strata tend to prefer traditional or relatively rare names, whereas popular and widely used names are more commonly found among lower social groups.

These findings are consistent with the research of Ainiala, Kostanski, Puzey, and Sabet & Zhang, and support the view that personal names should not be regarded as passive reflections of social processes. Rather, they function as active elements that participate in the formation and reproduction of social structures and social meanings within society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, personal names constitute a significant semiotic unit that reflects the social and ethnic structure of society. The socio-onomastic approach makes it possible to interpret names not merely as linguistic entities, but as phenomena closely intertwined with social and cultural processes. This study provides a solid theoretical foundation for understanding and analyzing social change through the lens of personal naming practices.

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