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The Challenge of Turkish Proper Names in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

The article aims to sort out semantic and cultural diversity in Turkish female and male names, which could be challenging for foreign learners of Turkish. This research was designed as a descriptive analysis into how foreign names could be semantically and culturally interfered by foreign language learners of Turkish. So as to make the classification, the most frequent 100 names of newborn Turkish citizens between 1950 and 2020 years were officially gathered from the Turkish Statistics Institute. The findings reveal that these names reflect a wide diversity ranging from functional words to their derivations since Turkish is an agglutinative language causing challenges for foreigners, and it deduces it is far beyond of their formations. It is assumed that these names raise critical language awareness on structural and deep cultural insights of target language.

Keywords: Onomastics, Turkish Personal Names, Gender, Word Formations

1. Introduction

Languages constitute great diversity wherein identity, heritage, ideology, geography, history, and literature are reflected in a distinctive way. Of these matters it appears identity standing for who we are and what we share as common language, culture and ideas indigenous to the society. The concept of 'identity' herein is belonging of people who determine their place in the social and cultural space in the World (Aksholakova, 2014, p. 465) within onomastics. The origin comes from the Greek word, ὀνομαστικός (*onomastikós*), which means "of or belonging to naming," from ὄνομα (*ónoma*) meaning 'name' (Oxford English Dictionary). The Association of Turkish Language defines it as proper names, especially, personal names. For scholars, it is the names convenient labels for identifying people and they are the governing entities behind the social meanings and the triggering constituent for the co-occurring predicative and pronominal forms (Anashkina and Konkova, 2018, p. 174). Hence, it includes a great value in language as mirroring the way specific groups of people to name themselves in words within semantics. In this respect, names also reflect the personal qualities, characters and even proficiency by arousing definite images about that society. This is how the others accept cultural norms and patterns of behavior, valuable orientations and language of this particular society (Aksholakova, 2014, p. 467). As a matter of fact, names in all societies reflect linguistic and cultural identities since they indicate the existence

of individuals, the differentiation of them in the society wherein they take part in terms of social and occupational actors. Aksholakova (2014: 467) cites name appears as a part of a language, consequently, names are a kind of reliable material. No matter however it is defined, all languages indicate names' appropriate labels to identify people, places and objects. Also it has been the focus of target language research in terms of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics for several decades. Regarding linguistics, personal names appear to be important twice as much since it focuses on morphological and semantic aspect. Ainiala and Östman (2018) accentuate that language structures selected should be presented in meaningful contexts and pattern drills observable in language teaching. Upon consideration of the basic theoretical framework, personal names would be observed through 'Cognitive-pragmatic Theory,' that focuses on the nature of linguistic knowledge (Nuyts, 1991). Coates (2009) draws attention to onomastics and distinguishes names in onymic and semantic references. The former is associated with proper meaning whereas the latter is associated with meaning. Whichever is taken into account, names are the fundamental inputs behind the social meanings and the triggering constituent for the co-occurring predicative and pronominal forms in addition to their 'semantic potential' in language units. Regarding from the syntactic point of view, when examined what activities, traditions, and processes are assigned to name of individuals in the act of naming, pragmatic aspects reveal because the nature of naming acts and their differences are determined by the mental approach of the name-givers (Nuyts, 1991, p. 145). That's why, several elements of personal names are unique to every language; for instance, in Russia, Ukraine or Belarus, the name and father name are considered to be the joint use and surname (e.g., Sergey Valentionevich Asanamiev/Írina Ivanova Novitskaya/Natalia Vladimirovna Vasileva). In England personal names can be divided into three parts: first name, middle/second name and last/family name (Jack Carlson/Jack Allen Carlson). Similarly, regarding Turkish personal names, they can be in two or three ways: name and surname (Mete Çelik), name, second name and surname (Mete Han Çelik). In short, it reveals the identity of communication in different parts of one's life, which is a burden for any foreign language learners while reading or hearing a Turkish name but getting lost about its appearance or sound. In other words, different person name models can be used in different parts of life (personal, public, professional domains, etc.). These models take place within the communication dimension accepted by the society (In public or professional domains=Turkey: *İbrahim Bey* 'first name plus Mr.', *Emel Hanım* 'first name plus Mrs. or Ms.'; England: *Mrs/Miss/Ms. Smith, Mr. Smith*; Belarus: *Olga Ivanova Denisovich, Dimitry Anatoliyevich*)- and (personal, social area=Turkey: *İbo/İbrahim, Emoş/Emel*; England: *Pam/Pamela, Mike/Mikeal*; Belarus: *Ola/Olichka/Olga, Dima/Dimitry*). To Calp (2014), this relationship between names and public administration reveals the usage in private (Emel-Emoş) and public (Emel-Emel Hanım) domain. According to these domains, names (middle name, name and surname, nicknames etc.) are always grounded matters hidden in themselves and cause misunderstandings for people from other cultures. Nonetheless, Aykut (2017) deduces valuable information about people's cultures as well as history, psychology, religion and customs of each society that has its own naming traditions as the way of life in society, way of thinking, social structure and reflective mirror (Calp, 2014). From this point of view, the burden could be coped with easily. Because as expressed by Aykut (2017, p. 423), the names of individuals not only regulate the cultural and individual identity of the human being but also the relationship by eliminating the confusion and the margin of error.

As afore-mentioned, proper names reveal the richness of language changing from country to country, revealing the country's unique historical and cultural heritage but also burdens to catch in the society. From this point of view, it is also an important cognitive input in language learning. Therefore, the cognitive basis and semantic aspects of naming should not be ignored while going through the exemplification of personal names in any language because this super diversity might break barriers and mutual prejudices among cultures since the semantic potential of language units make world people become aware and curious about identifying societal norms and values hidden in semantics. In brief, this potential is also unveiled through the help of onomastics, a clue symbol of identity. Yet, the focus of several intercultural studies is considered as incompletely explored (Petit & Sieffermann, p. 11). Thus, helping to build bridges of understanding and communication among cultures might be realized with onomastics that has been a great interest of scholars since ancient times dating back to the 15th Century. Since then, there have been several onomatological studies conveyed from different perspectives such as nature and direction of ongoing changes in names (Anashkina and Konkova, 2018. p. 4), spontaneous mnemonic strategies to use proper names (Saritaş, 2009); episodic records or transfer-appropriate processing (Vascenco, 1975); linguistic complexity of proper names (Murru-Corriga, 2000); morphology and semantics of

personal names (Ngoc-My, 2001) relationships, attitudes, and emotions concerning the self (Maduagwu, 2010); onomastics and ethnography of communication for historical family and community events (Vodanović, 2014); anthroponymic structures in discourse (Angelou, 1969); corpus-based investigation of names (Shokhenmayer, 2018). Therefore, reconstructing socio-cultural trends, forces, castes, professions, their creation and variation, linguistic significance as well as ethnic affiliation in different regions and communities were attempted (Anashkina and Konkova, 2018) in the field. It was articulated that modern linguistics, sociolinguistics or pragmatics and discourse analysis have taken less interest in proper names (Yumaguzin and Vinnik, 2019). Nevertheless, the insufficient critical approach to language study has unfocused on social aspects, especially language and power in addition to social relations and grammaticality, cohesiveness and coherence of the discourse (Vodanović, 2014). Hence, in recent years, interest in proper names not merely as labels but also their semantic potential has increased in multicultural classrooms where multicultural teaching approaches have often dealt with proper names from linguistic or cultural perspectives. No doubt, language and intercultural or intracultural awareness have played a role in these approaches. Matushansky (2009) highlights proper names are studied as syntactically simple, with no internal potential of semantics. Eugenia, Romanova, and Spiridonov (2018) underline importance of the pragmatic theory of properhood and its remaining unsolicited in theoretical onomastics by deducing the syntactic features of proper names. They discuss syntax produced by different structures and importance of lexical material stored in the lexicon with all the meanings associated with lexical units, which make the starting point of this uncharted matter in the current study. Their concern is also negotiation on that there is no consensus as to whether morphology is a module distinct from syntax or syntax is the module where morphological operations also occur. To Motschenbacher (2020), syntax of proper names is a relatively new field of study, much of the research in which is yet to be undertaken indicates long lasting studies on syntactic explanations of semantic problems. To Motschenbacher (2020), earlier onomastic research concentrated on the description of names in their own right, which means that their linguistic usage context has only insufficiently been taken into account (p. 9). Sengani (2018) negotiated to create identities positives with some oblique names just as labels. Tse (2004) claims that little has been done with respect to the grammatical account of proper names from a linguistic perspective, and her study is limited to pure titles as references, nicknames, epithets, and quasi names given to supernatural beings, and so on. Ainiala and Östman (2018: 8) put an end all discussions by stating onomastic research has been done for over 40 years and many areas have still hardly been touched upon, and by applying the question studying of personal names to be answered. No doubt, when all these aspects are regarded through semantic units of any foreign language, especially in the Systemic Functional Linguistics to focus on the metafunctions of languages, different cultures communicate effectively and appropriately as also given in semantic categories for Turkish personal names below.

2. Turkish Female and Male Names

Turkish personal names are reflected in logical and lexical semantics. They stand for semantically arts, atmospheric and natural events, seasons and months, priceless stones, animals, plants, colours, kindship, patriotism, professions, spirit of struggle, sense of nationality, common names in daily life, names used in addressing someone, abstract names, sounds and even greetings (Aykut, 2017, p. 665). Logical semantics appears in these names as much as lexical semantics. For instance, they reflect tenses, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, numbers, gerunds and participles and so on. Conceptually or logically, it gains richness on how children are given names according to their rank in the family like the first (*Ilker* 'first soldier' for males; *Ilkay* 'first moon' for females) and the last child (*Soner* 'the last soldier' for males; *Sonay* 'last moon' for females'). This fact for any foreign language learner of Turkish is an indication whether or not they reflect gender and derivational input as well. Even naming children with flowers makes a reflection of the importance of culture and even nature (*gül* 'rose'). Inspiration by animal names reflect their belief of 'Animal husbandary,' associated with qualities such as bravery, courage, ability, intelligence (*Aslan* 'lion,' *Şahin* 'falcon' for males and *Ceren* or *Ceylan* meaning 'gazella', *Ahu* 'deer', and *Suna* 'shelduck' for females). Additionally, religious names reveal the ancestral respect toward the prophet in the religion they belong to. Observation their environment and link the names to occurrences such as war, peace, natural events, good harvests and even agreements in families is common as well. Sometimes inaugurations of kings or queens are reflected in names revealing gender and vowel harmony, a burden for foreign language learners (i.e., *Banu* 'princess', *Ece* 'queen', *Melike* 'female ruler', etc.). In the same vein, Turkish people also give compound names including the lexicalisation process. As informed in these

examples, it is much more beyond it as explained below. To start with, names are taken from family elders either alive or passed away (grandmothers, grandfathers, grand-grandparents) as appears in many languages. It is great word puzzles to give similar names to twins ‘*Canan-Candan*’, ‘*Bilgi-Bilgin*’, ‘*Ecem-Ece*’, ‘*Demet-Buket*’ for female and ‘*Can-Cem*’, ‘*Bülent-Levent*’, ‘*Berk-Berkay*’, ‘*Can-Caner*’ for males. This puzzle not only makes language learners to vowel harmony but also to the suffixes gaining another meaning. This is a key factor for them to remember and produce their word formations in their sentences just looking around. Then, names are given as compatible factors with sister names ‘*Nuriye-Huriye*’, ‘*Nermin-Sermin*’ etc. for females and ‘*Tevfik-Fikret*’, ‘*Erhan-Erkan*’, ‘*Savaş-Bariş*’, ‘*Güney-Kuzey*’, etc.) for males. This manner is considered as tongue twisters for learners to practice as well. Names are given when mother or other family member is affected by a dream during the pregnancy (*Irmak* ‘river’, *Deniz* ‘sea’, *Ruya* ‘dream’, *Serap* ‘mirage’, *Aslan* ‘lion’, *Kaplan* ‘tiger’). Sometimes, families longing for children for a long time give specific names associated with their will, wish or hopes (*Murat* ‘will’, *Umut* ‘hope’) for their children to survive. Sometimes names of the loved relatives or friends are given with inspiration to keep the memory of those beloved ones in the family forever (Sarıtaş, 2009. p. 428; Ađırman, 1998). In the similar vein, names can be given according to the importance of the day/month when a child is born (*Kadir* ‘the holy night, to which Islamic belief, the Quran is the time when the God began to be revealed to the prophet, *Muhammad*; *Ramazán*-religious month namely Ramadan; *Nisan* ‘April’, *Eylül* ‘September’, etc.). Likewise, names are given regarding the events at baby-delivery time or season (*Bahar* ‘Spring’, *Yađmur* ‘Rain’, *Rüzgar* ‘storm’, *Mehtap* ‘moonlight’, *Şimşek* ‘lightening’), or the river or place of birth (*Dicle* ‘Tigrish’, *Fırat* ‘Euphrates’, *Doruk* ‘peak’). Moreover, names are given as first names and surnames, respectively (*Fırat*, *Yılmaz*, *Erdoğan*, *Özgür*, *Demir*, *Dođan*, etc.). As mentioned and exemplified with the examples, Turkish naming diversity could be termed as super diversity since the ones given above are one part of naming in Turkish culture. There are other examples listed severalfold: a) giving names by those who have many (enough) children and never desire of giving new births or deliveries (*Yeter* ‘enough’, *Songül* ‘the last rose’, *Dursun* ‘let him/her stay alive’, *Sondur* ‘the last one, namely last enough’; b) by those who want to change the gender of the child (*Döne* ‘wishing it were to turn’, *Döndü* ‘reneged’...). This is because of having the same gender, especially girls, and thinking to change this misfortunes for boys and also survive the family names for other generations, people decide to give such names; c) by those who may not have children because of miscarriages and early mortality, (*Durmuş* ‘he is said that he has survived’, *Songül* ‘the last rose’, *Yaşar* ‘the one who he lives’), ç) by those who name newborn babies regarding their rank in the family for the first or last delivery ones as afore-mentioned (*İlknur* ‘the first divine light’, *Sonnur* ‘the last divine light’, etc.), d) by those who want their children to be healthy and strong (*Yiđit* ‘brave’, *Kahraman* ‘hero/ valiant’, *Cesur* ‘courageous’, *Yađız* ‘bold’, *Efe* ‘swashbuckler’, etc.), e) by those who name their babies by looking at their physical appearance or characteristics (*Esmeray* ‘brunette moon’, *Gamze* ‘dimple’, *Deniz* ‘sea’ for those born with blue-seacolor-eyes, etc.), f) by those who give names of abstract semantic names are associated with beauty, tenderness, gift and grace (*Özlem* ‘passion’, *Ferman* ‘edict’ or *Gülten* ‘skin like rose’, *Armađan* or *Hediye* ‘gift’, *Zeki* ‘smart’, *Adil* ‘fair’, *Onur* ‘honour’, *Bilgi* ‘information’), g) by those who believe precious stone names are associated with deep value (*İnci* ‘pearl’, *Elmas* ‘diamond’), and also h) by those who want to show sympathy for forerunners of their nations and their uniqueness (*Savaş* ‘War’, *Bariş* ‘Peace’, *Zafer* ‘Victory’, and the names of famous personas like past Sultans, leaders, poets, authors, philosophers, political actors: *Selçuk*, *Cengiz*, *Osman*, *Fatih*, *Alparslan*, *Süleyman*, *Yavuz*, *Orhangazi*, *Mustafa Kemal*, *Murat*, *Selim* for males and *Sultan*, *Orhan Kemal*, *Halil İbrahim* etc.). In another viewpoint, some personal names can even be used for both men and women as gender-neutral names (*Yaşar*, *Ayhan*, *İlhan*, *Yüksel*, *Servet*, *Kamuran*, *Güngör* etc.). Regarding gender, there are also gender-specific suffixes (a female name is formed by converting a male name by suffixation of ‘e’, ‘a’ regarding the preceding vowel in the name and ‘ye’, ‘ya’ as buffer if male name ends in a vowel) in Turkish antroponomy (*Cemil-Cemile*, *Salih-Saliha*, *Şerif-Şerife*, *Zeki-Zekiye*, *Kadri-Kadriye*, etc.) as in the other languages (i.e., Czech: *Piotr-Petra*; Russian: *Aleksandr-Aleksandra*; Italian: *Georgo-Georgia*; English: *Victor-Victoria*, etc.). Zengin (1999: cited in Uca, 2004: 145) states that with these features, the names are the way of life, the way of thinking, the social structure and the mirror of that society. Akalın (1998: cited in Uca, 2004. p.146) stresses the fact that elders of the family could give names taken from the oldest written documents, even in the epics, perhaps belonging to prehistoric ages (*Bilge* ‘wise’, *Ođuz* ‘Oghuz’, *Göktürk* ‘Gokturk’ etc.) or can be influenced by important events of specific decades or ages (*Cumhur* ‘public’, *Hürriyet* ‘freedom’, *Kurtuluş* ‘independence’, etc.). As given in several categories above, Turkish personal names are illustrative to shed light on deep meanings and keep a question mark in minds by leaving its place as ‘tip-of-the-iceberg’.

which is required to unearth the questions in minds within several studies to be carried out. Additionally, icoranic names in the Qur'an are also common among the citizens to indicate their being followers (i.e., Havva 'Eva', Melek 'angel', Cennet 'heaven', Medine 'madinah', Meryem 'mariem', Firdevs 'heaven garden', Nur 'divine', Nisa, Nisanur, Ayşe, Fatma, Füsün 'magic', Tuba 'a tree in Heaven', Kevser 'the 108th Sura in the Quran' for females, and Adem 'Adam', Miraç 'miraj, holy night', Kudret 'might', İsa 'Jesus', Kadir 'dignity', Ali, İbrahim, Yusuf, Mustafa, Mümin 'Muslim', Yasin '36th Sura in the Quran', Resul 'prophet', Recep, Ramazan, Şaban, Nuh, Musa, Muharrem 'muhammad', Aşur 'ashura', Rabia, Davut, Yakup, Ruhi 'psychic' for males).

If lexical semantic patterns are on focus, there is a range of functional words: verbs (present: *Yaşar* 'he who lives'/past tense: *Döndü* 'she who returned'), gerunds *Sezen* 'she who feels', participles *Satılmış* 'he who had been sold', passives *Satılmış* 'he who had been sold', nouns (simple/compound/derivation), adjectives *Cesur* 'brave', negativity *Yılmaz* 'he who never quits', numbers *Binnur* 'a thousand divinity light', as well as simple noun '*Çiçek*' meaning of flower, compound noun '*Güldeste*' rose-bunch and *Gülseren* 'she who lays roses', derivatives *Kurtuluş* 'liberation', and so on.

Regarding all these potentials mirrored in the names proving the descriptive part of the study, this current study deserves close scrutiny on Turkish personal names and aims to sort out their semantic potential so as to present some hints mirrored in the formulation of grammatization and realization. As the second part of the study so as to reflect the cultural attitudes to name citizens, the core of this study is designed as a data collection of the corpora of Turkish names (n= 424.511; M. 206.849 and F: 217.662 constituting diversity of male and female names in the top hundred list: n= 594; M:286; F:308) by the Association of Turkish Statistics (TUIK) to realize appropriate and reliable results since all these constitute the identity of larger groups representing the population in 2020. The aim is to reflect the attitude of name givers regarding categories of religion, culture and patriotism since Turkey is Islamic country, yet super diversity in culture and has deep roots to its history. The list was restricted to the most frequent 100 names to investigate whether or not these three categories are reflected in. Yet, the list is limited merely to the years of 1950 and 2020 so as to give insights about the semantic and cultures hints of those from the past to the present date. It is assumed it gives an insight to the language learners about the names and their being changing throughout the years.

Table 1: Female and Male names of 1950 and 2020 by TUIK.

Categories	1950				2020			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Religion	34	34.00	39	39.00	39	39.00	42	42.00
Culture	61	61.00	46	46.00	58	58.00	35	35.00
Patriotism	5	05.00	15	15.00	3	3.00	23	23.00
Total	100		100		100		100	

As displayed in Table 1., the most common names in the top hundred lists appeared in religion, culture and patriotism categories. Apart from religion and patriotism, the culture category included several sub-sections reflecting the diversity of the Turkish population as afore-mentioned. However, when the findings were analyzed, the religious names were observed to increase throughout the years, whereas the culture-based names indicate a descending order from 1950 to 2020. Patriotic names are rarely utilized (5% in 1950; 3% in 2020) for females but male names are more common and reveal an ascending order (3% in 1950; 23% in 2020). Semantically, the religious names are found to range from garden of eden '*İrem*-Female' to righteous '*Salih*-Male' as well as girl of eden '*Huriye*', light of islam '*Nurettin*' for men. In the past the name of the prophet '*Muhammed*' in Islam was found inappropriate to name an individual and '*Mehmet*' was the name given to new-borns as its Turkish equivalence. Nevertheless, according to the names list in 2020, the prophet name was found as noun compound '*Muhammed Ali*', '*Muhammed Emin*', '*Muhammed Enes*' as well as single noun of '*Muhammet*' and '*Muhammed*'. In addition, some holy names calibrated in the Qur'an were given to females and

males (i.e., ‘Melek’ angel, ‘Elif’ given in Suras; ‘Ramazan’ Ramadan for males, ‘İsa’ Prophet Jesus, ‘Yusuf’ Prophet Joseph. For culture-based names, gratitude ‘Şükran’, graceful ‘Zarife’ for females and maturity ‘Kemal’, wise man ‘Hikmet’, praiseworthy man ‘Hamit’ and woman ‘Hamide’. Additionally, semantically the cultural names reflect the physical appearance such as facial beauty ‘Sebahat and Feride-Female’; Cemal-Male; even beautiful as much as fullmoon ‘Bedriye-Female’, and white-tanned, stupendous ‘Recep’ for males. It is also common to find names to reflect behavior such as matronly ‘Kamile’ for females and ‘Kamil’ for males and patience ‘Sabriye’ for females and ‘Sabri’ for males. Even though patriotic names are rarely found in the first hundred name list, they are given to children to indicate the families adorenness to their historical actors and victory in their past. For instance, name of ‘Türkan’ means the princess who affects the ruler, ‘Satı’ is the female leader. ‘Emirhan’ means the Khan who imparates and ‘Serhat’ is the soldier at the border. There are numerous names reflecting several potentials of semantics even in full sentences, which are the focus of another study. In the same vein, Turkish personal names reveal a wide range of semantic potential ranging from religion to patriotism (even identity, heritage, ideology, profession, and geography to emotional and economical indications).

3. Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings of the study put forward a valuable diversity of Turkish anthroponomy within the integration of semantics by raising awareness towards deep knowledge beyond that of onomastics [26]. Any personal name emboldens a deep insight and perspective rather than merely naming individuals as labels that happen in several languages. It goes beyond knowledge [14] revealing the way of life that could unearth the social structure as a mirror of that society. This is how language units make it easy for individuals to have an interest in names concealing unique particularities of form, identity, etymology, history as a way of meta-language awareness towards intercultural or intracultural diversity and of overcoming cultural barriers mutually. This study deduces that semantic potential of language units for foreign language learners of Turkish language as the literature is filled with surveys revealing the burdens and challenges of Turkish language for foreigners. In fact, Turkish language is very logical once the hints and insights could be captured by the foreign learners since all alterations are based on logical inputs. It broadens the constitutions of morphology and lexicon when they are grasped and realized within meaningful patterns in the lessons. In the same vein, this awareness can help to build bridges rather than build walls among the cultures. Additionally, when these super-indicators are taken as units of the linguistics for foreign language learners, they can be motivated to learn any language like Turkish, one of which is among agglutinative languages. Morphologically embedded units gain importance as alterations within sentence through the motivation. This permanent learning could be realized by putting these male and female names be frequently inserted in a wide diversity into the course books teaching Turkish as a foreign language for foreign learners since foreign learners of Turkish struggle with morphological units during their learning process. So as to raise logical awareness towards the challenges of the linguistic and cultural units, the characteristics of proper names lead to success to be achieved without burdens.

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