



Erol Sakallı

Uşak University, Uşak, Turkey

New Trends in Name-Giving in Turkey

Voprosy onomastiki, 2016, Volume 13, Issue 1, pp. 171-177

DOI: 10.15826/vopr_onom.2016.13.1.010

Language of the article: English

Erol Sakallı

Uşak University, Uşak, Turkey

New Trends in Name-Giving in Turkey

Вопросы ономастики. 2016. Т. 13. № 1. С. 171-177

DOI: 10.15826/vopr_onom.2016.13.1.010

Язык статьи: английский

DOI: 10.15826/vopr_onom.2016.13.1.010

UDC 811.815.5'373.231 + 39

Erol Sakalli

Uşak University

Uşak, Turkey

NEW TRENDS IN NAME-GIVING IN TURKEY

The author gives a brief review of traditional customs of name-giving in Turkey and analyses some recent trends. The observations are based on 1270 Turkish names collected from the author's students and reflecting naming practices in Turkey over last several decades. The data has been collected randomly regardless of social, regional, religious or ethnic backgrounds, all names being accompanied by the indication of the age of their bearers. The collected data were categorized into three groups: commemorative names, desiderata names and fortuitous names. This categorization shows the distribution of Turkish names and the changes in the stock of personal names over the years. The traditional name-giving customs are still observed in Turkey, however, new trends are becoming more prominent in the country. The author explains the changes with reference to social evolution which incites young educated parents, most of whom are university graduates living in urban areas and having only one child, to adopt new strategies of name-giving testifying their increasing individualism and weakening ties with traditions.

Key words: Turkic languages, Turkish language, personal names, name-giving customs, new trends in name-giving.

1. Introduction

Turks have a wide range of traditions and customs to name their children. Some of these traditions and customs are universal while the others are specific to the Turkic cultures. In their large two volume *Onomasticon Turcicum Turkic Personal Names*, László Rásonyi and Imre Baski write about almost all Turkic peoples' name-giving conventions: "Notwithstanding the traditional naming conventions, name-giving by the nomadic Turks was full of lightness, idea, imagination, fantasy and invention.

Turkic anthroponyms imply melody, rhyme and alliteration, pun and metaphor, polysemy and monosemy, myth and religion” [Rásonyi & Baski, 2007, xxii].

The analysis of literature shows that the name-giving customs characteristic of the Turks can broadly be categorized as follow:

1. the names of the Islamic prophet and his companions,
2. the names of grandparents,
3. the names of elder family members except for grandparents and parents,
4. totemistic names,
5. desiderata names,
6. fortuitous names [see Acıpayamlı, 1992; Çelik, 2005; Kibar, 2005; Rásonyi, Baski, 2007].

The first category is the result of the conversion to Islam which changed greatly the name-giving customs among Turks. As a result of their love and respect for the prophet and his companions, Turks started to give their names to their children. According to the official statistics released by the General Directorate of Civil Registration and Nationality of Ministry of Interior in 2014, between the years 2001 and 2013, the most common five female names are *Fatma*, *Ayşe*, *Emine*, *Hatice* and *Zeynep* while the most common five male names are *Mehmet*, *Mustafa*, *Ahmet*, *Ali* and *Hüseyin* [NVI]. These female names are the names of either the wives or the daughters of the prophet; likewise, the male names are either the names of the prophet himself (*Mehmet*, the Turkicized version of *Muhammad*) or the names of the prophet’s caliphs or grandsons.¹

As to the religious names like those mentioned above, Başgöz [1976] is of the opinion that these names are given to children not because they are the names of the religious leaders but because they are the names of the children’s grandparents. He believes that this has more to do with respecting the ancestors. In the Central Asian families, in particular, giving the name of the grandfather or grandmother is common due to the extended concept of family. “Traditionally, the extended family of Central Asia consists of patriarch, his wife, his married and unmarried sons, his unmarried daughters, and the children of his sons” [Krader, 1966, 141]. In such a case, perhaps, giving the name of the grandparents is not only a sign of respect for the ancestors but also a cultural imperative.

The term *totemistic names* usually refers to the names derived from the names of animals, e.g. *Şahin* ‘falcon’, *Aslan* ‘lion’, *Doğan* ‘hawk’, *Bozkurt* ‘grey wolf’, names which prevailed among the ancient Turks but are less common today.

The term *desiderata names* refers to the names that “express the parents’ wish, protection and appeal to the spiritual world. If one or more newborns die, the parents, who think that they could avert their death, usually choose the names *Satılmış* ‘he

¹ This trend — giving Arabic names — has increased to the extent that many Arabic words which are originally not personal names have been given to children. *Nükhet* ‘nice odor’, *Bihter* ‘better’ and *Kamran* ‘happy’ are some of these examples [cf. Acıpayamlı, 1992].

who was sold', *Yaşar* 'he who lives (long)' for their subsequent children" [Uca, 2004, 147]. If parents do not want to have more children they usually choose the names like *Durmuş* 'he who stopped', *Dursun* 'let him stop' or, for girls, *Yeter* 'enough'. The same custom is also observed among the Tatars who give their children names like *Torsın* (= *Dursun*) or *Tirik* 'alive, lively' when they wish their children did not die and lived long [Alkaya, 2001, 121].

Giving fortuitous names is another trend widespread among Turkic peoples all over the Central Eurasia. In Turkey, however, most common fortuitous names would be those related to meteorological phenomena such as *Yağmur* 'rain', *Ayaz* 'frost', *Bulut* 'cloud', or astronomical objects such as *Yıldız* 'star', *Mehtap* 'moonlight' or *Güneş* 'sun'.

While practically all the traditional name giving customs can be observed in modern Turkey (even if some of them are losing popularity), recently new customs have emerged. The new trends give evidence of parents becoming wealthier, more educated and more "modernized."

2. Some new trends in name-giving

The students studying at the Department of modern Turkic dialects and literatures at Uşak University (Uşak, Turkey) were asked to make a list of the names of their family members including the oldest and the youngest. The total number of the collected names reached 1270. As these students come from different regions and cities of the country, the obtained list is expected to reflect the customs and trends of name-giving of Turkey. These names were categorized into three groups: commemorative names, which include the names of grandparents, parents, national or religious leaders, respected people and historical titles, desiderata names, and fortuitous names. Among 1270 names 487 belong to the first category, 94 belong to the second, and 689 belong to the third category.

The analysis of the collected data shows that giving the names of the grandfather or the grandmother to the newborn can still be seen largely in Turkey, with a slight difference though. Especially after the 1990s, many parents give their newborns a second name *Can* 'spirit, the essence of a person' if a boy and *Nur* 'light sent by God' if a girl. Therefore, there have been many names such as *Ali Can*, *Osman Can*, *Fevzi Can* for boys and names *Ayşe Nur*, *Fatma Nur*, *Fadime Nur* for girls. The first names are the traditional names belonging to the grandparents while the second *Can* and *Nur* are used to make the names sound more modern and, perhaps, as a sign of self-expression of parents. By doing so, they both please their parents and give their newborn a name different from the traditional one.² Sometimes, parents give their newborns the names

² This trend is quite acceptable in Turkey since the custom of giving double names, a universal trend, has been in practice for many years. Cf. the most common names for boys: *Ali Osman*, a combination of the names of the fourth and third caliphs, and *Hasan Hüseyin*, a combination of the names of two grandsons of the prophet.

of both grandparents for the sake of pleasing them. *Hadise Arife* is an example of this: *Hadise* ‘event, something new’ is the name of the paternal grandmother while *Arife* ‘intelligent woman’ is the name of the maternal grandmother. However, the emergence of this kind of names can be explained by economic and social factors. Since modern parents do not want to have more than one child anymore, they give their children two names to please the two grandparents at once. This trend is similar to that in Greece: “two baptismal names were customary in the past, but now only one is the rule. The trend is again going to two baptismal names. This happens because many couples usually do not want more than one child (mostly for economic reasons), so they want to give both their parents’ names to the child” [Parianou, 2007, 10].

Giving phonetically distinct names is another new trend in Turkey. Words, not actually personal names, are given to newborns just because of their different yet euphonic pronunciation, e.g. *Bağlam* ‘context’ for a boy, *Ecrin* ‘price, fee, charge’ for a girl. Two more examples of this custom are *Ebrar* ‘good, religious people’ and *Buğlem* ‘angel that heralds the heaven’.³ All these names are phonetically distinct, euphonic and rare. The rarity of the names is also important in this case. *Eymen* ‘auspicious’ and *Elfin* ‘little perisher, fairylike’ *Azra* ‘virgin, un-pierced pearl’, *Beril* ‘purified’, *Belinay* ‘the reflection of the moon on a lake’ are some of the examples of rare names. *Eymen*, name of Arabic origin, and *Elfin*, name of English origin, have been given to newborns born mainly after the year 2000. *Kübra* ‘huge, the biggest’ and *Büşra* ‘good news’ were, just like *Bağlam*, *Ecrin*, *Eymen* and *Elfin* are today, quite widespread during the nineties. The ratio of *Azra* is 0.03% and the ratio of *Beril* is 0.024%, the ratio of *Eymen* is 0.025% and the ratio of *Elfin* is so little that no statistics could be found for it in Turkey [İAN].

Names from foreign cultures and languages have recently become more common. The names like *Cansın* (< *Johnson*, the name of an American president) or *Fidel* (< *Fidel*, the name of the ex-president of Cuba) were given to newborns a few decades ago as a sign of the parents’ political or ideological leanings [Gülensoy, 2012]. These names are still given but mostly for uniqueness, only a few parents are aware of the meaning of these names and their foreign origin. Since the pronunciation of *Cansın* is similar to the Turkish expression meaning ‘you are full of spirit, lively’ (*can* means ‘spirit, life’ and *-sın* is the second person marker), parents prefer this originally American name for their sons. *Melisa* ‘melissa, balm’ (name of Greek origin) and *Gupse* ‘hearty, kind-hearted’ (name of Circassian origin) are other examples of these kind of names.

The names of the months have been given to newborns for centuries by Turkic peoples. This trend, though it was not so common a few decades ago, is now becoming more and more current in Turkey. *Eylül* ‘September’ and *Nisan* ‘April’ are now the two most common names for girls. It is a widespread practice among the Turks to give their newborn the name of the month they are born in. This was particularly true in the past

³ Both these names are said to be of Arabic origin, however, while *Ebrar* is attested in Arabic dictionaries, *Buğlem* could not be found. The meaning and the origin of this name is unknown [Fetva].

when parents had a boy in the holy months of Islam, *Recep*, *Şaban*, *Ramazan*. That is why there are so many people bearing these names in Turkey. However, this practice is not as common as it used to be. It is almost impossible to see the name *Şaban* among the boys born after the 1980s. *Recep* and *Ramazan* are relatively more numerous than *Şaban* but this is not because the people bearing these names were born in the respective holy months but mainly because these are the names of their grandfathers.

Another interesting trend in name-giving is that parents choose names for their children from television series or movies. This is a universal trend which is now spreading in Turkey. The tradition of giving children the names of cardinal directions has been for long observed in Turkey. However, after the television series *Kuzey Güney* started in 2011, in which two brothers called *Kuzey* ‘north’ and *Güney* ‘south’ were the main characters, these names have become particularly popular in the country. In the list of names provided by the students, two boys born in 2013 were given the name *Kuzey*. Likewise, after another television series *İntikam* was shown on television the name of the main female character *Derin* ‘deep’ was given to girls born in 2013. *Çakır* ‘a person having blue or blueish eyes’ is another name that became widespread after a television series, *Kurtlar Vadisi*. *Çakır* was the charismatic main male character in the series and his name has been given to new-born boys especially after he was shot dead in episode 43 shown in 2004. *Seymen*, a male name meaning ‘brave, hero’, *Selena*, a female name meaning ‘beauty’, are other examples of the names given to newborns after television series.

3. Conclusion

While from the 1930s till 1980s, names such as *Abdullah* (the name of the prophet’s father), *Ahmet* (one of the names of the prophet), *Ali* (the name of the son-in-law of the prophet and the fourth caliph), *Mehmet* (the Turkicized version of *Muhammad*), *Ayşe* (the name of the prophet’s wife), *Fatma* (the name of the prophet’s daughter), *Zeynep* (the name of the prophet’s granddaughter) were very common, after the 1980s, when Turkey launched a foreign expansion policy, these names began to wane. The 1990s were characterized by such names as *Merve* (the name of a mountain in Mecca), *Kübra* ‘the biggest’, *Büşra* ‘good news’, *Ebru* ‘marbling’ for girls and *Emrah* ‘the ruler who orders’ and *Emre* ‘lover, minstrel, friend’ for boys, most of them being of Arabic origin.

As of the first decade of the new millennium, it is hard to classify the names. In the data provided by the students, it is possible to find traditional names such as *Fatma*, *Ayşe*, *Ahmet*, *Mehmet*, along with double names (one part being the name of the grandfather or the grandmother and the second being a so-called “modern name”) such as *Yusuf Eren* or *Hamide Nur*, new names such as *Destina* ‘destiny’, *Helin* ‘bird nest’, historical names such as *Kağan* ‘khan’, *Kayra* ‘blessing, grace’ (it is also the name of a god in a Turkish epic).

In the second decade of the millennium the stock of personal names in use has become particularly varied. The distribution of the names collected for this study also supports this conclusion. The last category — fortuitous names — is the largest one because it comprises all new emerging names. Some of the new names are *Tuana* ‘the first rain drop in the Heaven’s garden’, *Ada* ‘island’, *Beril* ‘purified’, *Erva* ‘a very handsome and courageous young man’, *Ceylin*, *Mira*.⁴

The trends in name-giving in Turkey have significantly changed during the last two decades. The reasons of this change have been mentioned above. However, the most important reason, I believe, is the social evolution: parents do not any longer want to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors, they become more individualistic and try to be distinct. This is especially true for educated parents most of whom are university graduates living in urban areas, having double income and only one child.

-
- Acıpayamlı, O. (1992). Türk Kültüründe ‘Ad Koyma Folkloru’nün Morfolojik ve Fonksiyonel Yönlerden İncelenmesi [A Morphological and Functional Survey of Name-Giving Folklore in Turkic Culture]. In *IV. Milletlerarası Türk Halk Kültürü Kongresi Bildirileri* [Proceedings of the 4th International Congress on Turkic Folklore] (Vol. 4, pp. 1–14). Ankara: Ofset Reformat Matbaası.
- Alkaya, E. (2001). Tatar Türklerinin Kullandığı Türkçe Kişi Adları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme [A Survey of Personal Names Used by Turkic Tatars]. *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 11(1), 115–136.
- Başgöz, İ. (1976). İnsan Adları ve Toplum [Personal Names and Society]. *Türk Dili*, 294, 164–170.
- Çelik, C. (2005). *İsim Kültürü ve Din* [Name Culture and Religion]. Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları.
- Devellioğlu, F. (2007) *Osmanlıca-Türkçe Ansiklopedik Sözlük* [Encyclopedic Dictionary of Ottoman Turkish]. Ankara: Aydın Kitabevi Yayınları.
- Fetva. Retrieved from <http://www.fetva.net>
- Gülensoy, T. (2012). XXI. Yüzyılda Türkiye Kişi Adlarına Bir Bakış [An Overview of Personal Names in the 21st Century Turkey]. *İdil Dergisi*, 22(1), 1–7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7816/idil-01-05-01>
- İAN — *İsminin anlamı ne?* [What is the Meaning of the Name?]. Retrieved from <http://www.isminin-anlamine.com>
- Kibar, O. (2005). *Türk Kültüründe Ad Verme* [Name-Giving in Turkish Culture]. Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.
- Krader, L. (1966). *Peoples of Central Asia*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Publications; The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- NVI — Nüfus ve Vatandaşlık İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü [General Directorate of Civil Registration and Nationality]. Retrieved from <http://www.nvi.gov.tr/NVI.html>
- Parianou, A. (2007). *Greek Personal Names*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency.

⁴ The etymological meaning of the last two names is unclear. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Ottoman-Turkish* gives the meaning of *ceyl* as ‘crab’ and indicates it to be of Arabic origin [Devellioğlu, 2007, 139]. But according to the Persian-English Dictionary *ceyl* means ‘race, nation’ [Steingass, 1930, 383], and likewise, the *Dictionary of Turkish* gives the meaning of this word as ‘nation, generation’ [Sami, 2010, 176]. However, the word *ceylin* exists in none of the above-mentioned dictionaries. The name *Mira* is also of foreign origin, but it is difficult to say from what language it comes (the corresponding stem is present in many languages that could have served as the source for this name).

- Rásonyi, L., Baski, I. (2007) *Onomasticon Turcicum. Turkic Personal Names*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Publications.
- Sami, Ş. (2010). *Kamus-ı Türki* [Dictionary of Turkish]. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.
- Steingass, F. (1930). *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & CO. LTD.
- Uca, A. (2004). Türk Toplumunda Ad Verme Geleneği [Name-Giving Traditions in Turkish Society]. *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 11(23), 145–150.

Received 18 June 2015

* * *

Sakallı, Erol

PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Turkic Dialects and Literatures
Uşak University
Faculty of Arts, First September Campus,
64200 Uşak, Turkey
E-mail: erol.sakalli@usak.edu.tr

Сакаллы, Эрол

PhD, доцент кафедры современных тюркских языков и литературы
Ушакский университет
Uşak Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi,
Bir Eylül Kampüsü, 64200 Uşak, Turkey
E-mail: erol.sakalli@usak.edu.tr

Эрол Сакаллы

Ушакский университет
Ушак, Турция

НОВЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ ИМЯНАРЕЧЕНИЯ В ТУРЦИИ

В статье дается краткий обзор традиционных стратегий имянаречения в Турции и анализируются новые тенденции. Наблюдения основаны на корпусе из 1 270 имен, собранных автором посредством опроса студентов и отражающих практики именованья за последние несколько десятилетий. Данные собирались безотносительно социальных, религиозных или этнических факторов, для каждого имени указывался возраст его носителя. Собранные имена были распределены по трем группам: коммеморативные имена, оптативные имена и акцидентные имена. Эта типология позволяет отследить изменения в классификационной дистрибуции турецких личных имен за последнее время. Автор констатирует, что традиционные стратегии имянаречения все еще активно используются в Турции, тем не менее, все более ярко проявляют себя и новые тенденции. Автор объясняет их, апеллируя к социальным изменениям, подталкивающим молодых образованных родителей, большинство из которых имеют высшее образование, являются городскими жителями и имеют только одного ребенка, следовать нетрадиционным принципам имянаречения, свидетельствующими о возрастающем в турецком обществе индивидуализме и ослаблении связей с традициями.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: тюркские языки, турецкий язык, антропонимы, личные имена, традиции имянаречения, новые тенденции в имянаречении.

Рукопись поступила в редакцию 18.06.2015