

A Sociolinguistic Study of Choosing Names for Newborn Children in Jordan

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Received: 7 December 2015 Accepted: 4 January 2016 Published: 15 January 2016

Abstract

This study aims at the study of newborn names in Jordan of a sociolinguistic perspective. This study tries to detect the difference in naming newborns in Jordan over the decades - from the seventies to 2015 due to the result of some factors that may have affected the Jordanian society, whether historical, religious and/or social. The data necessary to complete the study was obtained from the Civil Status Department and the Department of Statistics. The data obtained consisted of names of both sexes during the time period from the seventies until the early year of 2015, a random sample of personal names within the same family were also provided. The data was analyzed quantitatively. The study revealed that there is a clear change in the choice of newborn names - male and female - in Jordan, whether a change in sounds or in morphemes. In specific, names during the seventies were strongly linked to the culture and the values, religious or social, in which the people believed in. During the eighties and nineties, names were associated with certain social values, however, some names were shown to be affected by urbanization or modernization. And with the beginning of 2000 up to 2015, peoples directions towards naming newborns changed due to the advent of globalization, associating with development and urbanization, and moreover, the influence of different cultures on the community.

Index terms— naming practice, newborns, culture, sociolinguistic.

seen as that of naming, as far as we can sign or indicate the history of linguistic estimation". According to Leach (1980:306), states that there is a connection between a name and its bearer, which is created after choosing such a name. Also, Palmer (1981) shows that names are words used as a signifier and what objects referred to as a descriptor.

For human beings, a name is definitely the most important rights for human being that should carry an esthetical characteristic and have an acceptable meaning in society, so everyone should have a good name. The names which belong to humans are personal names, these are either person's name, family name or even person's nicknames. Mehrabian and Piercy (1993) mention that the name gives an impression, either positive or negative such as (Wh?a) ?i??"???? , and has a corresponding impact in social interaction. Naming one's child with a pleasant name is one of the Islamic principles.

So, muslim parents are forced to choose a good name for their children. The Prophet Muhammad peace and praise be upon him-said, "To whoever is born a boy and he names him Mohammad solely for the love of one and for the blessing name then both he and his son", because names affect the person's character (Raafat:2004). Because personal names give the confidence to their bearers, that tell everybody all over the world who you are, and may tell the occasion and the origins behind choosing such names.

Names are studied from a semantic point of view. Not all names have a meaning, when they have a meaning, they tend to have a positive impression (Zuraiq, 1999). As stated by Crystal, sound and meaning are hard to separate from each other (Crystal, 1995).

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naming as sons were named after their grandfather and daughters after their grandmothers. The researcher explain that by consider this phenomenon as a tradition in the society which keep the name live not to die or the bearer of such a name is a distinguish person in the family.

5 b) The Choice of Newborn Names During the Period between the 80s and the 90s

As a result of the process of urbanization and modernization in all aspects of life, including naming, there is a strong tendency to abandon traditional, long, and compound names in favour of modern names which are described by many parents as being short, soft, and easy to write and pronounce, such as, /rana:/ ? ,???? /rjm/ ????? , and /nur/???? .

6 ii. In Relation to Religion

In relation to religion, the majority of Jordanian people are Muslims so they mainly choose Arabic-Islamic names. In this period of time, the names chosen still carried the Arabic-Islamic features, such as the female names /fa:?ma/ ? ,i? "????? /mu?amad/ ? ,????? /?ema:n/????????? , /mrjm/????????? and /?md/????????? .

7 iii. In Relation to Social Factors

During the 80s and the 90s, the names identified by the researcher, were more authenticity such as the male names, /jazn/????? , /lai?/ ????? , /ra:mj/ ?????? , and female names /?na:n/? ,????? /ra?a:/? ,????? and /nu:r/? ,????? This can be analyzed to indicate that the change in the daily lifestyle of the Jordanian people were affected by the appearance of satellite channels podcasting from all around the world, carrying with them not only new cultures but also new thoughts and ideologies, influencing the change in the choice of newborn names, for both male and female.

Also, in these periods of time, compound names were still used whether how Abd-el-Jawad classified them, mentioned and/or noticed above or as the researcher classified previously. The following table shows the most frequent names chosen for this period of time. The names was arranged in the table randomly. Based on the analysis of gathered data, the researcher was able to identify the most frequent names chosen during the period between the 80s and 90s.

8 i. In Relation to Historical Events

Due to the Iran-Iraq War, also known as the First Persian Gulf War, the names /?adam/????????? which is the name of the late president of Iraq , we noticed that in this period the frequent of chosen the name was 1056 out of 16342 and /?udy/ ?????? became the most frequently chosen names, as people became affected by the political events of these times, and this is due to the historical relations between the two counties, Jordan and Iraq.

9 Table 2 : Names and frequency during the 80s-90s

It is noticeable that female newborn and male newborn names were fitting, right, or true for persons during this period of time. The names are associated with the increase of modernization and urbanization of Jordanian people.

c) The Choice of Newborn Names During the Period between the 2000 to the 2015 i. In Relation to Historical Events In the relation to the historical factors of this period, there were no noticeable changes in the choice of names for newborn males and females, even though these times were full of historical events, such as the Arab Spring, which mainly included all the neighboring countries.

However, in the early 2015, due to the recent "political" events in the Middle East, and moreover, after the brutal murder of the Jordanian pilot "Moath Al-Kasasbeh" ?????? ? ,i? "????????? many Jordanian newborns have been given the name /mua:ð/ ? ,????? This can be taken as a symbol of loyalty and unity of the Jordanian people.

10 ii. In Relation to Religion

In relation to religion, the researcher has noticed that newborn male names remained to carry the Arab-Islamic feature with only a few foreign names, whereas, the Arab-Islamic features of female newborn names had decreased to the state where they are no longer used, or only a small percentage remains present. The researcher predict that the newborn female names which carry an Arabic-Islamic features will eventually disappear or at least become even less used in the future years to come.

11 iii. In Relation To Social Factors

In the last two decades, Jordan, as many other communities in the Middle East, has witnessed and experienced tremendous, modernization, urbanization, globalization, and the Internet. Due to these revolutions, the world has become as some say "a small village", therefore, different societies and cultures have intertwined, borrowing and exchange not only terms and expressions, but also personal names. The consequence of this international

communication is the appearance of new and foreign names bestowed upon male and female newborn names. So, it has become natural to hear of an Arab girl called /ʔlma:/ or /sɪljn/ or an Arab boy called /kɪna:n/ or /ʔmɪr/. The choice of such names seems to be due to that foreign names are easy to pronounce, spell, and recall. Also, mass media during these particular periods play a significant role in developing this phenomenon, as Jordanian, like other nations, watch foreign programs and series on TV influencing lives.

Based on the data gathered, the researcher noticed, that during the year 2000 to the 2015, that there was a large increase in the number of newborns given foreign names, for instance, the female names /ʔeljn/ , /ʔwɪljn/ and /rɪtɑ:l/ and the male names /rɪɑ:n/ , and /ʔɑ:d/ . This phenomenon of newborns with foreign names is thought to have arisen due to the large number of Turkish and Western TV series and movies. A foreign newborn male name and newborn female name signify modernity, prestige and pride. To the opposite, this phenomenon of personal foreign naming could be a strategy of breaking away from traditional values. The following table shows the frequently chosen names for this period of time. ??, these particular names were chosen, and arranged randomly, as they are the most frequently given birth names for both genders during this period as the result of the globalization and modernization.

Data analysis reveals a sex differentiation in naming patterns. The results seem to support one of the most important findings about sex-based language variation which emerged from sociolinguistic studies in the industrialized western world. These studies prove that women tend to be on the average to use more higher-status and prestigious linguistic change taking place in the direction of socially prestigious linguistic forms, and if new linguistic forms are introduced, women will be ahead of men ??labov 1972 ?? Trudgill 1974 ?? and Chambers and Trudgill 1980).

Since a name is a symbol of identification, it can be also a symbol of social prestige. For females, a name is consider as a part of her beauty; therefore, parents choose an attractive name for their daughters, so they search carefully to find an attractive one which is beautiful both in sound and meaning. On the other hand, for males, a name is consider as a part of his personality; therefore, when parents choose a name for their son they select traditional and old names which once were very common. It could be said as in the Arab proverb "To every person his name is fortune". The Prophet, peace be upon him, changed the names of many of his companions to carry the best and noblest meanings, and he changed Amr Bin Hisham's nickname from Aba Alhikmato Abu Jahl for his insistence on infidelity.

During the study the researcher has noticed that compound names are no longer used as the use of these kinds of names have been discouraged by the government in this period of time.

12 Table 4 : Arabic-Islamic Names

As shown in Table ??, the main difference between male and female is the disappearance of religious female names such as /fa:ʔma/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ the frequency of the name in the 2015 compared to the previous generations. The researcher believes that in the forthcoming days with the rapid increase in the use of English and foreign names this will further exist to effect the choice of names as, the newborn male names carrying an Arabic-Islamic features and which indicate qualities and attribution of manhood, courage, nobility and generosity will die out as well as newborn female names which have started to die since the beginning of the process of modernization and globalization.

These particular names, as shown in table 4, have been chosen for their religious significance, as these names will never die out or become unused. Religious feelings reflect on the lifestyle, pattern of thinking, and consequently the linguistic behavior including naming. As noticed, people during the seventies, people refused the influence of the Western culture and decided to keep the choice of Arab Islamic prestigious names but with the passage of time and with the emergence of urbanization or modernization and technology people seemed to accept the entry and the influence of the Western culture and then the acceptance of its effect, also in the choice of names. Throughout this study, the researcher noticed that the first two generations the parents derive the names of females from the names of males, such as the female name /ʔɑ:dʒɑ/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ from the male name /ʔɑ:dʒ/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ /fa:dʒɑ/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ from /fa:dʒ/ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ and /fatʔjɑ/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ from the name /fatʔi/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ and so on. But this phenomenon has almost disappeared nowadays.

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14 d) Phonetic Change of Sound Pattern Personal Names through Times

While analysing the gathered data, the researcher observed that there are a number of phonetic changes in sound pattern of personal names, especially in female names.

The data shows that the phonetic sounds of personal names have changed throughout time. In comparing and contrasting personal names from the 70s with those from the 2014-2015, we can see that in the past names used to be heavy and consist of dark sounds, such as the dark /l/ sound. As in, the female names /xawla/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ , /nawa:l/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ and /xolwd/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ whereas the 2015 names seem to be more lighter and more rhythmic, such as the female names, /ʔeljn/ ʔɪʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ /ljn/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ and /jɑ:ra:/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ . This can be mainly seen in female names more than male names. This phenomenon formed maybe as a result of the political chaos surrounding the

community, affecting clearly and concretely on the choice of names, making it possible to say that the political chaos formed a mess in the selected names.

15 e) How the Names are Chosen within the Same Family

As another interesting fact about naming newborns, throughout the study the researcher observed that there was, in some families, a trend of choosing similar names for siblings that making their family distinguished from others, many strategies may be used: The first one, is by the use of similar sound for all children, such as /su:ha/ ???? /nu:ha/???? and /maha/ ???? . The second, is by the use of the same beginning sound, such as /xulwd/ ???? and /xalid/ ???? The third, is by the use of the similar ending sound to name all children such as /alla:~/ ???? /baha:~/ ???? /wafa:~/ ???? and /?ala:~/ ???? These strategies can be visible in many families in Jordan, a possible justification for the use of these strategies is that it makes it more easier for the parents to call their children, as some find it joyful for if they call one child, all may answer as they all have the same sounds in their names. Another justification is that some parents find it more musical to name all their children using the same rhythm. And we can say that parents subconsciously substitute similar sounding sibling names more often than dissimilar names.

16 Summary and Conclusion

This present study, which arose from a sociolinguistic interest, is an identification of how the choice of names for newborn children in Jordan has changed throughout the eras, as documented in the official database at the Department of civil status and by the Department of Statistics. It also aimed at identifying the reasons behind the difference in choice of names given to newborn children in Jordan, in relation to the social, religious, and historical events, which occurred during the eras in question.

The researcher came up with the following conclusions. Generally, the change in the choice of names for newborns is quite evident. Especially, in relation to the events, circumstances, and political conditions affecting the Jordanian society during the times, this can be most evident during the 1970s all through to the early year of 2015. With the evidence of the choice of mostly 'Jedahi' names in the 70s, and the choice of naming newborns after well known politicians during the 80s to 90s, due to the wars and political events which happened during this decade, as mentioned previously. Such trend seemed to fade during the years 2000 to 2014, despite the political events present at such time, the Arab Spring. However, at the beginning of the year 2015, it was evident once more with the obvious increase in the choice of the name /mua:ð/???? after the Martyr Jordanian pilot 'Moath Al-kasasbeh'.

The political and atmospheric conditions and circumstances, which have happened during these periods of time, have had a great impact on the society's daily life, resulting in their thinking of wars, battles and Jihad. Consequently, the choice of newborn names for male and female were also affected.

With regard to religion, the findings show that the choice of Arabic-Islamic names is evident during the 70s, for both males and females, as newborns were named after Prophets, messengers, and famous religious figures. During the 80s to 90s, male's names still seemed to carry Arabic-Islamic features, whereas, a minor change in the choice of female names was visible, as they became lighter and more modern. This became more evident during the years 2000 to 2015, as the Arabic-Islamic features of female names decreased and the appearance of more names carrying no religious features what so ever. It was predicted that the choice of female Arabic-Islamic names will eventually become rare and therefore less used in the future years to come.

Religious feelings reflect on the lifestyle, pattern of thinking, and consequently the linguistic behavior including naming. As noticed, people during the 70s, refused the influence of the western culture and decided to keep the choice of Arabic-Islamic prestigious names. On the other hand, as time proceeded with the emergence of urbanization/modernization and technical development, people seemed to accept the entry and the influence of the Western culture and then the acceptance of its effect, not only on their lifestyle, but also on their choice of names.

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With regard to the social features affecting the choice of names for newborns in Jordan, it was quite evident during the 70s that family values played a great role in the choice of names, as children were named after either their grandfather or grandmother or even after an uncle or an aunt. This comes to show how close and intermit families were during this time. When coming to the 80s and 90s, it was evident that the choice of names for newborns was affected by technical development, moreover, the home invasion by satellite channels resulted in the enlightenment of the Jordanian people to different cultures and ideologies, and even more, resulting in the choice of foreign and more modern names for their newborns. During the 2000 to 2015, a large increase in the number of foreign names given to newborns, especially females was evidently visible. This is mostly due to the Internet and the increase of Turkish and Western television series, as people have become influenced by these TV programmes that they began naming their children after certain characters; even though these names are of Arabic origin, they have not been used in the same way as after the appearance of dubbed TV series. This can be seen as a strategy for steering away from traditional values towards modernization.

Accordingly, for a person, his/her name becomes the property of his/her personality. Like every aspect of society, the name, which is a symbolic system of identification, is usually "historically constructed, socially maintained, and based on shared assumption of a particular community" (Akinnaso 1980:227). In the present days, in Jordan, the bestowal of a newborn's name is the parents' duty.

Since a name is a symbol of identification, it can be also a symbol of social prestige. For females, a name is consider as a part of her beauty; therefore, parents choose an attractive name for their daughters, so they search carefully to find an attractive one which is beautiful both in sound and meaning. On the other hand, for males, a name is consider as a part of his personality; therefore, when parents choose a name for their son they select traditional and old names which once were very common. Furthermore, while reviewing the gathered data, more evidence of change in the choice of newborn names surfaced, either being in the structure, meaning and/or gender.

Firstly, it was noticed that during the 70s to the late 80s some female names were derived from names that of males, such as the female name /ʔa:dja/ ʔiʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ from the male name /ʔa:dj/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ , /fa:dja/ ʔiʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ from the male name /fa:dj/,ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ and /fatʔja/ ʔiʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ from the male name /fatʔj/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ and so on. But as coming to the 90s, this phenomenon has almost disappear.

Secondly, the phonetic differentiation of personal names throughout the eras; It was observed that there is a number of phonetic changes in the sounds of personal names, especially in female names.

Findings show that the phonetic sounds of personal names have changed throughout time. In comparing personal names from the 70s with those from the 2014-2015, in the past names used to be heavy and consist of dark sounds, such as the dark /l/ sound, (e.g., the female names /xawla/ ʔoʔʔʔʔʔʔ , /nawa:l/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔ and /xulwd/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔ whereas, in 2014-2015 names seem to be more lighter, rhythmic, shorter and easier to pronounce and spell, such as the female names, /ʔeljn/ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ , /ljn/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔ and /ja:ra:/ ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ . This can be mainly seen in female names more than in male names.

Thirdly, naming newborns within the same family, i.e., brothers and sisters. As another interesting fact about naming newborns, it was observed that in some families there was a trend of choosing similar names for siblings. In order to make their family distinguished from others.

A possible justification for the use of this is that it makes it easier for parents to call their children, as some find it joyful as if they call one child, all the other children may answer as they all have the same sounds in their names, making it hard to distinguish which name is being called. Another justification is that some parents find it more musical to name all their children using the same rhythm ending. And it can be said that parents subconsciously substitute similar sounding sibling names more often than dissimilar names.

Fourthly, during the 70s there were as called 'Compound Names' which are personal names consisting of more than one name. According to ??bd-el-Jawad (1986) Finally, as a general aspect noticed to be present in all periods in question, that there are some female names written/spelled in more than one way, such as the name /ra:nja/ ??????((? ? ?????? ? ?i?"????? which is written with three ending variations"???? or ??r?"??? or ?,??? all carrying the same meaning and pronunciation, but different spelling. This phenomenon may be related to the non-standardized spelling of such names by the community.

In conclusion, personal names are useful tools for reference as they provide information on various events in the life of an individual, the family or the society.

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Figure 1:

Female names	Name Frequency	Rate%	Male names	Name Frequency	Rate%
<u>hna:</u> حنان	1753	9.0	<u>Jazn</u> يزن	598	1.7
<u>rafa:</u> رشا	1445	7.4	<u>laiθ</u> ليث	583	1.6
<u>nu:r</u> نور	1172	6.5	<u>ra:mj</u> رامي	627	1.8
<u>Fa:ljma</u> فاطمة	1340	6.9	<u>ʒadam</u> صدام	1056	3.1
<u>ʔema:n</u> ايمان	1753	7.4	<u>ʕudy</u> عدي	1458	4.2
<u>mrijm</u> مريم	733	3.7	<u>muḥamad</u> محمد	10126	29.4
<u>ʕa:ʔja</u> عائشة	186	1	<u>ʔḥmd</u> احمد	5947	17.3

Figure 2:

Female names	Name Frequency	Rate	Male names	Name Frequency	Rate
<u>ʔeljn</u> إلين	893	1.1	<u>rja:n</u> ريان	1638	1.7
<u>lja:n</u> ليان	2129	2.4	<u>ja:d</u> جاد	534	0.6
<u>rita:l</u> ريتال	1128	1.3	<u>ʔmjr</u> أمير	2488	2.7
<u>mja:r</u> ميار	1197	1.4	<u>ʕbd alrḥmā:n</u> عبد الرحمن	3467	3.7
<u>fa:tma</u> فاطمة	432	0.5	<u>Muḥamad</u> محمد	12859	13.7
<u>ʕa:ʔja</u> عائشة	112	0.1	<u>ʔḥmd</u> أحمد	4781	4.9

Figure 3:

Period	Female name		Male names	
	<u>Fa:tma</u>	<u>ʕa:ʔja</u>	<u>Muhamad</u>	<u>ʔhmd</u>
70s	1431	401	5559	2575
80s-90s	1318	186	8813	4707
2000-2015	432	112	15642	4781

Figure 4:

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Female names			Male names		
Name	Rate%	Fre-quency	Name	Rate%	Fre-quency
ʔʔi»ʔʔʔʔ kifa:ʔ	724	6.4	ʔʔʔʔʔʔ Nidha:l	796	3.7
ʔi»ʔʔʔʔʔ fidaʔ	450	3.9	ʔʔʔʔʔʔ ʔihad	712	2.9
ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔ ʔenteʔar	683	5.9	ʔʔʔʔʔʔ na:ʔr	604	2.8
ʔʔʔʔʔʔ naʔa:ʔ	468	4.1	ʔi»ʔʔʔʔʔʔ fa:rs	563	2.6
ʔʔʔʔʔʔiʔʔʔʔ a:ʔʔaʔ	401	3.5	ʔʔʔʔʔʔ muʔamad	4514	21.6
ʔi»ʔʔʔʔiʔʔʔʔ fa:ʔma	1431	12.6	ʔʔʔʔʔʔʔʔmd	2329	11

[Note: A Sociolinguistic Study of Choosing Names for Newborn Children in Jordan]

Figure 5: Table 1 :

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[Note: A]

Figure 6:

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[Note: A? Arabic References]

Figure 7:

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