HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

ETYMOLOGICAL AND LEXICO-SEMANTIC FEATURES OF MALE NAMES GIVEN AND CHANGED BY THE PROPHET

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doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22830902

Abstract: This article provides a linguistic analysis of narrations concerning the naming of men and the changing of certain names by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The phenomena of selecting a name, proposing a name change, and addressing a person by a kunya are distinguished from one another. The semantic relationship between the names Hazn and Sahl, Asram and Zur'a, the theophoric structure of the names Abdullah and Abdurrahman, and the connection of the name Ibrahim with cultural memory are examined. Particular attention is paid to the precise source of each narration, the outcome of the naming process, and the distinction between lexical meaning and contextual interpretation. The study demonstrates that not all cases of name changing can be explained by a single motivation and that personal names perform different functions in semantic evaluation and social communication.
Keywords: Islamic anthroponymy, name changing, etymology, semantics, kunya, naming motivation, theophoric name, pragmatics, socio-onomastics.

Introduction

In understanding historical and literary texts concerning the Companions of the Prophet, personal names, nasab, kunyahs, and laqabs serve as important means of identification. The fact that one person may be referred to by several different names, or that the same name may belong to several individuals, requires particular attention when comparing sources. For this reason, the study of a name cannot be limited merely to finding its translation; the participants, circumstances, and purpose of the naming event must also be examined.

In onomastics, the status of a name within the linguistic system and its use in society are studied in their interrelationship [1; 2]. This relationship is particularly evident in religious and cultural texts: a name distinguishes an individual while simultaneously recalling a particular value or expressing an evaluative attitude in communication. However, the social function of a name does not automatically allow conclusions to be drawn about the actual moral qualities of its bearer.

The purpose of this article is to interpret, from structural-semantic and pragmatic perspectives, source-based examples concerning the naming of men and the changing of personal names. The giving of a new name, a proposal to change an existing name, and addressing someone through a kunya are treated as separate phenomena. Such differentiation prevents different onomastic facts from being conflated as a single type of evidence.

Materials and Methods

The principal material of the study was drawn from narrations concerning naming and name changing found in the collections of al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawud [3–9]. For each example, the old and new forms of the name, the content of the narration, the outcome of the event, and the source reference were identified separately. The principal semantic fields of the Arabic lexemes were explained with reference to a lexical source [10]. The analysis is qualitative in nature; no quantitative conclusions are drawn regarding the general prevalence of these examples in the historical period.

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In evaluating the sources, a distinction is made between the main narration in a collection and the author's supplementary comments. Hadith numbers are given according to the electronic editions used, since numbering may differ across other editions. A distinction is also maintained between information contained in the narration and its linguistic interpretation: the former is derived from the source, while the latter is justified on the basis of textual and lexical relationships.

Well-known expressions concerning naming should not be cited as evidence without consideration of their source status. For example, in the electronic edition of Abu Dawud 4948, the narration stating that people will be called on the Day of Resurrection by their own names and the names of their fathers is recorded as having been classified as "weak" by al-Albani; Abu Dawud himself also indicates an interruption in the chain of transmission [11]. Therefore, this narration is not used as a principal evidential basis for the present study.

Structural and Semantic Foundations of Naming

The denotative function of a personal name consists in identifying a particular individual. The common noun underlying that name, however, may evoke either a positive or a negative evaluation. When a name is changed, the person himself does not change, but the linguistic means by which he is designated and the associations connected with that designation are renewed. This phenomenon may be interpreted as a semantic reorientation of naming.

In this context, the concept of a "good meaning" is not limited merely to external beauty or praise. Religious affiliation, gentleness, vitality, historical memory, and communicative convenience may carry different degrees of significance in different examples. Likewise, the morphological structure of a name does not completely determine the purpose of its use. Names of the same structural type may express different cultural relationships when applied to different individuals and situations.

The Opposition between Hazn and Sahl

In al-Bukhari's narration 6190, Hazn ibn Wahb is reported to have been offered the name Sahl, but he did not wish to change the name given to him by his father [3]. Therefore, it would be incorrect to describe this example as a completed event in which "Hazn's name was changed to Sahl." The source clearly indicates that a proposal was made, but also that the bearer of the name did not accept it.

Lexically, the form Hazn is associated with the semantic field of roughness and unevenness, whereas Sahl is connected with flatness, smoothness, and ease [10]. Within the naming situation, this opposition may be transferred metaphorically to interpersonal conduct. The interpretation in terms of "gentleness" is based on this semantic relationship, but it does not prove a causal claim that a person's name necessarily determines his character.

Two values intersect in this example: the preference for a semantically more favorable name and loyalty to the name given by one's father. Because a personal name may also function as a marker of family memory, changing it can have a broader significance for the individual than a simple lexical correction. This conclusion represents a linguistic-pragmatic interpretation of the response in the narration and should not be applied uniformly to all cases of name changing.

The Semantic Relationship between the Names Asram and Zur'a

Abu Dawud's narration 4954 records that a man named Asram was given the name Zur'a [4]. The root of the name Asram is associated with the semantic field of cutting off or severing, whereas Zur'a is connected with crops, cultivation, and growth [10]. From this perspective, the name change reflects a transition from the concept of interruption or severance to the concept of growth and productivity.

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This example differs from the Hazn–Sahl pair because no objection to the new name is recorded. Nevertheless, later biographical details not mentioned in the narration cannot be inferred solely from the semantics of the name. A methodologically justified interpretation should remain limited to the lexical motivation of the name and the act of name replacement explicitly described in the narration.

While the opposition between Hazn and Sahl is relatively direct, the relationship between Asram and Zur'a involves a stronger associative contrast between semantic fields. Thus, it is insufficient to explain all name changes simply as substitutions between lexical antonyms. In some cases, direct lexical opposition is involved, whereas in others a culturally more positive conceptual association is preferred.

The Theophoric Structure of the Names Abdullah and Abdurrahman

In Sahih Muslim, narration 2132 refers to the preferred status of the names Abdullah and Abdurrahman [5]. Both names possess a structure in which the component abd is connected with the name or an attribute of Allah. Abdullah means "servant of Allah," while Abdurrahman means "servant of the Most Merciful." In these names, no divine quality is attributed to the bearer; rather, the relationship of servitude is explicitly represented within the structure of the name.

This hadith provides evidence concerning recommended names. It does not, by itself, indicate which specific earlier name of a particular Companion was replaced by which new name. Therefore, a general recommendation should be distinguished from an individual biographical event of name changing. Likewise, the existence of religiously meaningful names does not imply that all Muslim personal names must necessarily follow this structural model.

The Name Ibrahim and Historical Memory

In Sahih Muslim, narration 2145 reports that the newborn son of Abu Musa was given the name Ibrahim [6]. This example does not involve the correction of a previously existing unfavorable name; rather, it represents an act of initial naming. It should therefore be analyzed separately from examples of name changing.

The name Ibrahim evokes a well-known figure in religious history and gives the naming act a commemorative dimension. The cultural influence of the anthroponym in this case is not restricted to its lexical translation. By recalling earlier narratives and the prophetic tradition, the name becomes connected with collective memory. Therefore, separating etymological analysis from its historical-cultural context would leave one of the principal functions of the name unexplored.

Source Characteristics of the Report Concerning the Name Harb

In a comment following Abu Dawud's narration 4956, the replacement of the name Harb, meaning "war," with the form Salm or Silm, associated with the meaning of peace, is mentioned [7]. Instead of automatically rendering this form as Salam, the form found in the source and the characteristics of its pronunciation should be taken into consideration. The principal semantic relationship consists in the opposition between the concepts of war and peace.

In this comment, Abu Dawud states that the chains of transmission of some reports were omitted for the sake of brevity. Consequently, methodological caution is required when presenting all examples in this list in the same manner as the principal narration. The Harb example is therefore cited as supplementary textual evidence, and no general conclusion is drawn from it that every personal name with a negative meaning was necessarily changed.

The Pragmatic Difference between Kunya and Personal Name

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The distinction between a personal name and a kunya is explicitly visible in the narration concerning Abu al-Qasim [8]. A kunya may serve as an additional means of identification alongside the primary personal name. Its structural meaning and its rules of use in a particular communicative situation complement one another, but they are not identical. For this reason, a narration concerning a kunya should not be interpreted as a general lexical prohibition applicable to the meaning of the word itself.

The hadith concerning the form of address Abu Umayr demonstrates the function of the kunya in establishing a warm relationship with a child [9]. In this case, the component Abu was not used to indicate actual fatherhood. Instead, the kunya functioned as a form of address expressing social closeness and respect. Thus, from an onomastic perspective, changing a personal name and assigning an additional form of address represent different processes.

Discussion

The examples examined above demonstrate the necessity of distinguishing naming phenomena according to their purpose and outcome. In the case of Hazn, there is a proposal to change the name; in the case of Asram, a new name is assigned; and in the case of Ibrahim, an infant receives an initial personal name. The narration concerning Abdullah and Abdurrahman identifies recommended names, whereas the examples involving kunyahs illustrate the socio-pragmatic function of forms of address.

What these phenomena share is an emphasis on the semantic content of a name. Their differences lie in the type of speech act involved: recommendation, proposal, naming, and address must be distinguished from one another. Taking these criteria into account makes it possible to classify the facts found in historical texts with greater precision. The positive meaning of a personal name is not an empirical measure of the bearer's conduct; rather, it reflects a concept or attitude approved in the naming process.

In a study devoted specifically to male personal names, changes involving female names or the renaming of places may be included only for a clearly defined comparative purpose. Otherwise, the scope of the object of study becomes too broad and it becomes unclear to which category the conclusions apply. For this reason, the principal findings of this article are presented within the framework of selected anthroponymic examples relating to men.

Conclusion

Narrations concerning the naming of men and the changing of certain names by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reflect a range of phenomena related to semantic evaluation, religious affiliation, historical memory, and communicative etiquette. Rather than reducing all such cases to a single explanatory cause, it is more productive to examine separately the source, lexical composition, and communicative situation of each example.

Three criteria are of decisive importance for the analysis: distinguishing a personal name from a kunya, differentiating a proposal to change a name from an actually completed name change, and avoiding the equation of lexical meaning with historical motivation. These criteria improve the precision of scholarly interpretation of anthroponyms found in religious and literary sources and provide a consistent foundation for further comparative research.

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