The Linguistic and Non-linguistic Factors That Affect Choosing Names of People in Jordan from Al Zaytoonah University Students' Point of View

Dima Mohammad Al-Wahsh[1]

[1]*Instructor, Department of Human Sciences, Al-Zaytoonah Private University of Jordan: Amman, Jordan*

Abstract

Choosing a name for someone is not easy task. It depends on different factors and circumstances. Various illustrations and justifications are given by parents to explain the reasons of choosing the given names for their sons and daughters. Some of these reasons relate to the language that is used in the society. Other reasons emerge from the several interactions between the person and his society and the person with this world. This research studies the etymology of names in Jordan. Names that were chosen to Jordanian people in the last four decades. It tries to shed light on the different reasons of naming people of Jordan. Also, it tries to find out the most frequent reason among all of them.

Keywords: Name, Linguistic factors, Non- linguistic factors

1. Introduction

Choosing a name for the baby is not easy task. It can be tricky. Also, it is a big and difficult decision because there are just so many to choose from even if you narrow it down. Our names are not our own decisions but they are our parents'. Either we liked our given names or not, they became an essential part of ourselves.

Different illustrations are given by parents to explain the reasons for giving them a specific name to their baby. They may give a name just to be trendy, traditional or unique. Sometimes, they use a family name or name the baby after someone who inspired them. Moreover, they may depend on the meaning of the name just to find a very distinctive name. If we look deeply at the reason that is used to name everyone we know, we will find tens of these different reasons.

1.1 Significance of the Study

The Jordanians are people of an Arabic society with a majority of Muslims and a small percentage of Christians. They are a mixture of different nationalities starting from the local people of Jordan to the multi-national people and refugees who came to Jordan for living because of the continual wars and conflicts that have happened in the Middle East region during the last years or for working and investing. Also, with the big influence of the mass media like the television and the social media like Facebook, Instigram, Twitter, etc…, The Jordanian society blends between modernity and tradition. These factors and much more have many reflections in the Jordanian society in different aspects. One of these aspects is choosing names of people in Jordan. The importance of this study lies on studying the Jordanian society through the process of naming its people.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to highlight the different linguistic and non-linguistic factors or reasons which are used for choosing names of people in Jordan from the students' point of view, moreover, it aimed at investigating the effect of gender of the students and the academic year on their point of view.

1.3 Questions of the Study

Depending on this study, the researcher tries to find answers for the following questions:

1. What are the linguistic and non-linguistic factors that affect choosing names for people in Jordan?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in the students' point of views due to their gender (Male, Female)?

3. Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of views of the students due to their nationality (Jordanian, Non Jordanian)?

1.4 Limitations of the study

This study is limited to students at Al Zaytoonah University during the first semester in the academic year 2016/2017.

2. Review of Related Literature

Definition of "name"

The word "name" – as defined in Oxford Wordpower Dictionary- is a noun refers to the word or words by which a person, animal, place or thing is known. Your first name (US often "given name") is the name your parents choose for you when you are born. It is very common in Christian countries to call this your Christian name. It can also be called your forename, although this is more formal and maybe found on forms, documents, etc. [Oxford Wordpower Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1999].

Linguistic and Non-linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors are the factors which are related to the language that is used in a certain society. Lehmann (1976), defines "linguistics" as "the scientific study of a language." This science has many sub-fields, but this study concerns with only the semantic field which deals with words and their uses, and the sociolinguistic field which studies a language in a certain society. Lehmann (1976) talks about semantics: "semantics seeks to account for the relationships of words and sentences with things and events in the outside world". Words can be names of things or people. They necessarily must have meanings referring to something in this big world. Hall (2008:50) says that "… words and meanings are two sides of a single coin, one word form for each word meaning." Also, he says: "It is part of our folk linguistic knowledge that human language arose through a process of naming things." Obviously, everything and everyone in this world have a name referring to it. Lyons (1977) says: "… names are frequently used simply to draw the hearer's attention to the presence of the person being named or to remind the hearer of the existence or relevance of the person being named." Also, he says: "By the vocative function of names is meant their being used to attract the attention of the person being called or summoned."

On the other hand, the non-linguistic factors are the ones which refer to the technological, religious, political, social factors that the researcher thinks have a role in the process of naming people. Every society –in addition to its language- has its own religion, culture, traditions, customs, etc. All these various features make one society distinctive among other societies. Wardhaugh (2010) defines "language" as "what the members of a particular society speak.", and "society" as "any group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes." Lehmann (1976) says: "In general sociolinguists set out to determine how social institutions affect language and how the varied uses of language affect social groups." The different aspects of a society besides its language blend in a very complicated way that make one society have its own characteristics. According to the researcher, these features may interfere in choosing the name of a certain person. This study sheds light on the reasons that stand behind naming people. Hall (2008) says: "Most educated language users do know that each name has an etymology, its own personal history." This specific point of Hall is the main content of this study.

Statistics of Names in Jordan

The researcher has not found any Jordanian study concerning with the reasons of giving people their own names. On the other hand, she found different studies and websites talking about the statistics of names in Jordan. For instance, in 2015, the General Director of The General Statistical Administration of Jordan- Dr. Qasem Al-Zu'bi has announced that Jordan has 9,531,712 population: 6,6 million are Jordanian and approximate 3 million are not Jordanian. In 2004, the number was 4,4 million population. That refers to a very important and obvious change that happened in Jordan through the last years. Also, the big number of the non-Jordanian people refers to possible changes which certainly have effects on the Jordanian society including the process of choosing names of people-from the researcher's point of view.

In 2014, The Department of Statistics announced that some names have kept the same percentage of frequency of both male and female names during the last four years. For example, the most frequent name of

males in 2014 was "Mohammad" with frequency of (11401), then Ahmad, Omar, Yousef, Abd-Rahman, Amir, Zaid, Ibrahim, Hamza,…etc. While the most frequent female name was "Jood" with frequency of (2332), then Jana, Layaan, Jouri, Sarah, Leen, Salma, Hala, Noor, Tala, Farah, Ghazal, Rimaas, Mariam, Aya, Mira, Rital, Zeina and Bisan. These frequencies with almost the same order also were announced by The Manager of the Public Relations of The Civil Status and Passport Department- Malek Al- Khasawnah- 2016.

2.1 Previous Studies

Laura Wattenberg is a name expert and the author of Baby Name Wizard.com and the author of *The Baby Name Wizard.* She is known for deriving cultural insights from scientific analysis of name usage as well as creating innovative interactive tools to communicate these insights. Wattenberg is frequently quoted in the media on name- related topics. She says: "I've spent the past decade studying the names we give our children—to help parents find their perfect names, and to understand what name trends tell us about our society." She also says: "when people choose a name, we don't realize how much we are influenced by the world around us."" Parents seem focused on finding a name that is distinctive… a name that everybody likes and nobody uses." [From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia].

Another author wrote different books on names and the reasons of choosing them is Pamela Redmond Satran. She is an American author of fiction and function. She got a job as a fashion editor at Glamour magazine. She left Glamour to write a book on names with Linda Rosenkrants, with whom she wrote a number of other books on names such as Beyond Jennifer and Jason (2006), Cool Names for Babies (2008) and The Baby Name Bible (2011). Moreover, she started a website called "Nameberry). In her book (The Baby Name Bible), Satran says: "Parents have become much more conscious about the power of a name."

Some quotes of Pamela Satran on names: she says: "It's the confluence of exposure and the name being unusual, attractive and a bit different.", "[And more parents are creating] word names,… people are looking for a color, a bird, a fish, a feeling that embodies something they care about." Also, she says: "Now there are thousands of people with those names that wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for them. This generation of parents is looking to get away from Cookie-Cutter stuff, and our culture of celebrities is supporting that." [From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia].

Al Qawasmeh & Al-abed Al-haq (2016) conducted a study entitled "A Sociolinguistic Study of Choosing Names for Newborn Children in Jordan" 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.

Sharma's book (2005) titled "Panorama of Indian Anthroponomy" provides a list of the latest trends and fancies of the selection and coinage of names by different Indian castes, communities and regions.

Ogie (2002) investigates Edo personal names and argues that they are used to affirm certain aspects of Edo culture. The linguistic aspect of the study breaks names into its constituent morphological parts to reveal their meanings. To confirm the notion that personal names reflect important aspects of the culture of societies.

Agyekum's study (2006) deals with naming as an important aspect of the Akan society and looks at Akan names within the pure linguistic anthropology. According to Agyekum, names are not arbitrary labels but socio-cultural tags that have socio-cultural functions and meanings. The study also discusses the typology of Akan names.

3. Design and Methodology

3.1 Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all students who are studying at Al Zaytoonah University during the academic year 2016/2017

3.2 Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of 200 students studying at Al Zaytoonah University in the first semester 2016/2017.

3.3 Instrument of the study

A questionnaire was distributed among the students at Al Zaytoonah university and this questionnaire was designed by the researcher herself, it consisted of 25 items. Many variables were included such as the gender of the student, and the study year.

3.4 Reliability of the instrument

To ensure the questionnaire reliability, the researcher applied it to a pilot sample of (20) students excluded of the study sample with a one three weeks period between the first and second time it was distributed. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using correlation coefficient and it was found 0, 87 which is suitable to conduct such a study.

3.5 Procedures of the study

A questionnaire about linguistic and non-linguistic factors that affect choosing names in Jordan was given to 200 students (52 males, and 148 females). After that the researcher collected the questionnaires and collected data, and then this data was analyzed statistically.

3.6 Statistical analysis

The results were analyzed for the items in the questionnaire using suitable statistical methods such as mean and standard deviation. The researcher also used figures to clarify the results more.

Findings of the study

The purpose of this study is to highlight the different linguistic and non-linguistic factors or reasons which are used for choosing names of people in Jordan from the students' point of view; moreover, it aimed at investigating the effect of gender of the students and their nationality on their point of view. A questionnaire was distributed among 200 students, 52 males and 148 females from Al Zaytoonah University. Means and standard deviations and T-test were used to analyze the results.

To answer the first question: What are the linguistic and nonlinguistic factors that affect choosing names for people in Jordan? A questionnaire was distributed among them and means and standard deviation were calculated. Results were shown in table 1

Table 1: students' point of views about the factors that affect choosing names in Jordan

	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Do you like your name?	4.04	.979
2.	Is your name too specific to the time?	4.04	1.004
3.	Have you ever thought of changing your name?	3.25	1.139
4.	Does your name have difficult or unusual spellings?	3.28	1.034
5.	Is your name highly popular / common?	3.97	.958
6.	Is your name not well-known?	3.20	1.149
7.	Does your name start with the same letter as one of your siblings	3.30	1.190
8.	Does your name start with unfortunate initials?	4.03	1.061
9.	Is your name associated with widely-held stereotypes?	3.39	1.254
10.	Do you think that your name is unique?	3.84	1.114
11.	Do you think that your name is common?	4.39	.975
12.	Do you think that your name is trendy?	2.90	1.287
13.	Do you think that your name is traditional?	3.58	1.421
14.	Does your name relate to a certain political event or reason?	2.93	1.107
15.	Have you got your name because of its meaning?	3.74	1.187
16.	Have you got your name after a member of your family?	4.12	1.017
17.	Have you got your name after a celebrity?	3.39	1.224
18.	Does your name relate to a religious reason?	3.13	1.061
19.	Is your name Arabic?	4.22	.948
20.	Is your name not Arabic?	4.45	.863
21.	Do you think that your parents have used technology such as the Internet or the mass media like T.V. for choosing your name?	4.17	1.044
22.	Do you not have any idea about the reason of giving you such a name?	3.00	1.199
23.	Do you think that your name suits our modern life?	3.57	1.343
24.	Is your name strongly associated with a famous individual	2.98	1.059
25.	Does your name rhyme with something obscene or embarrassing	3.65	1.153
	QALL	3.62	.522

Table 1 shows there are statistically significant differences in students' opinions about the factors that affect choosing names for people in Jordan. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (200) students about their point of views about the factors that affect choosing names of people in Jordan. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that question 20 got the highest mean which was (4.45); question 11 comes next with a mean of (4.39).

Standard deviation for question 20 was (0.863) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for question 11 was nearly the same; it was (0.975) which is also statistically significant.
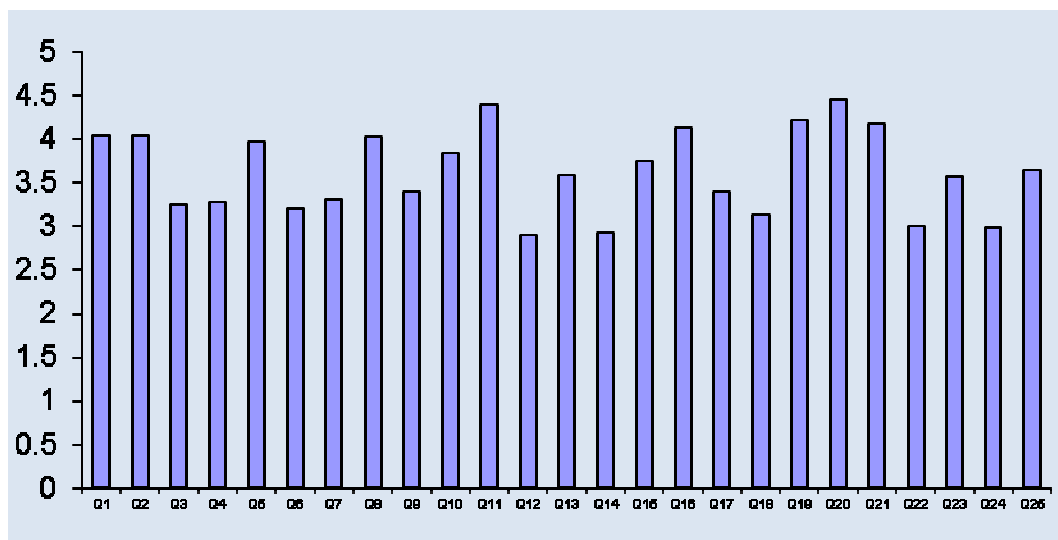
Diagram 1: students' point of views about the factors that affect choosing names in Jordan

It is clear in the diagram that the mean of question 20 was the highest mean, question 11 comes next. The mean of the (1, 2, 16, 19 and 21) are nearly the same, so students point of view about the reasons that affect choosing names in Jordan are negative.

To answer the second question: Are there any statistically significant differences in the students' point of views due to their gender (Male, Female)? Means and standard deviations were computed and table 2 shows the results.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to gender variable

gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	52	3.49	.473	-2.375	221	.018
Female	148	3.67	.533			

Table 2 shows there are statistically significant differences due to gender variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (200) students about their point of views about the factors that affect choosing names of people in Jordan. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that female teachers got a higher mean than male students which was (3.67, and 3.49) respectively; this indicates that gender have an effect on students' point of views.

Standard deviation for female students was (0.533) which is higher than (α≤0, 05) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for male students was lower; it was (0.473) which is also statistically significant. So, table 2 shows there are statistically significant differences due to gender variable in favor of females.
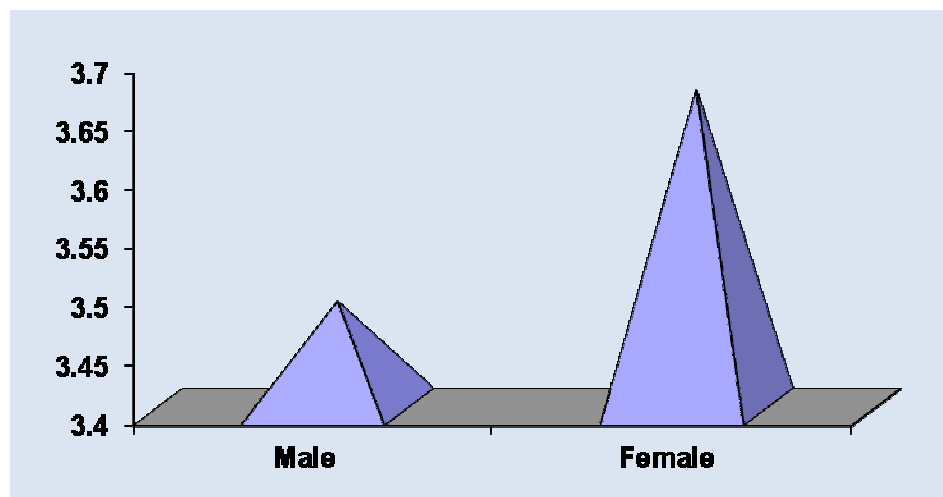
Diagram 2: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to gender variable

Diagram 2 shows that male students got lower positive point of views about the factors that affect choosing names of people in Jordan than female students.

To answer the third question: Are there any statistically significant differences in the point of views of the students due to their nationality (Jordanian, Non Jordanian)? Means and standard deviations were computed and table 3 shows the results.

Table 3: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to students' nationality

Study year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Jordanian	141	3.70	.446	3.592	221	.000
Non Jordanian	59	3.44	.625			

Table 3 shows there are statistically significant differences due to nationality variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (200) students about their point of views about the factors that affect choosing names of people in Jordan. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that Jordanian students got a higher mean than Non Jordanian students which was (3.70, and 3.44) respectively; this indicates that nationality have an effect on students point of views.

Standard deviation for Jordanian students was (0.446) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0$, 05) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for Non Jordanian students was higher; it was (0.625) which is also statistically significant. So, table 3 shows there are statistically significant differences due to study year variable in favor of first year students.
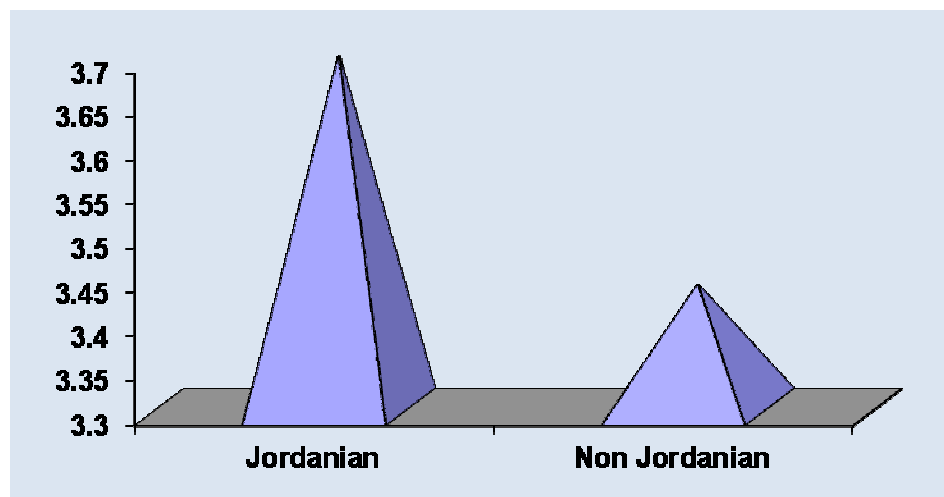
Diagram 3: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to nationality variable

Diagram 3 shows that Jordanian students got more positive point of views about the factors that affect choosing names of people in Jordan than Non Jordanian students.

Conclusion

The study showed that there are many reasons behind the naming of newborn in Jordan, the students point of views differ according to their gender and nationality. In fact, there were differences in the respondents' answers on the questionnaire. The researcher can't generalize the results because the sample is not enough, so she recommended that some other researchers may repeat the study on a wider sample in other universities.

References

Agyekum, K. (2006). The Sociolinguistics of Akan personal names. Nordic Journal of African Studies, 15 (1), 206-235.

Al-Qawasmi, A. & Al-Abed Al-Haq, F. (2016) A Sociolinguistic Study of Choosing Names for Newborn Children in Jordan, International Journal of English Linguistics; Vol. 6, No. 1

Hall,C. (2008). An Introduction to language and Linguistics: Breaking the Language Spell. Christopher J. Hall.

Lehmann, W. (1976). Descriptive Linguistics (2nd ed.). Random House, Inc.

Lyons, J. (1977). Semantics. Cambridge University Press.

Ogie, O. (2002). Edo personal names and world view. In Ohioma I. Pogosan and Francis O. Egbokhare. (Eds.), New perspectives in Edoid studies: Essays in honour of Ronald Peter Schaefer. Cape Town RSA: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, Book Series no.20.

Oxford Wordpower Dictionary. (1999). Oxford University Press.

Sharma, D. D. (2005). Panorama of Indian anthroponomy: An historical, socio-cultural and linguistic analysis of Indian personal names. New Delhi: Mittal.

Wardhaugh, R. (2010). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics (6th ed.). Ronald Wardhaugh.