Semantic Interpretations of Cats Given Names

MaisaJaber, Hana Daana

Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: April 14, 2021 Accepted: September 16, 2021 **Keywords :** Onomastics,Given Name,Physical Appearance **DOI:** 10.5281/zenodo.5512987	*This study was designed to investigate the given names of cats in an Arabic-speaking community of Jordan. For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed or displayed on the Facebook page Ask Jordan. A total number of 153 names were collected, studied, analyzed, and then categorized. The results reveal that, in Jordan, the names of cats fall into different categories classified in accordance with the cat's physical appearance, a cartoon or a movie character, a classical or traditional name, a circumstantial name, a name given after the owner's friend, relative or even neighbour. The results also reveal that cats are also given popular nicknames. Very few names were used without any particular reason. The study ends with a recommendation for further studies to analyze the names of pet cats in other countries.*

Introduction

This paper is a descriptive study within the field of onomastics research on animal names, specifically pet cats in Amman. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term 'onomastics' is defined as "the science or study of the origin and forms of proper names of persons or places." This field is concerned with various characteristics of names and naming that have been tackled through different aspects such as personal names (called anthroponyms), brand names, toponyms (or place names), and common animal names known as zoonyms (American Name Society, 2016).

Naming something enables us to communicate about it, whether the object named is animate or inanimate, human or non-human. It is a diversified field in linguistics that has witnessed a growing interest throughout the years. Hajdu (2003) stated that studying names can be traced back to ancient Egypt and arose in the late fourth millennia B.C. Onomastics started with the study of old Egyptian hieroglyphics in which the Egyptians used symbols to represent their gods' and pharaohs' proper names. Moreover, evidence for naming and the reasons behind names were found in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament (Hajdu, 2003). Naming things started with the creation of humankind; after all, the first thing that prophet Adam learned was the name of the creations.

Personal names have been studied thoroughly in recent decades, and many studies have provided lists of names with their references, such as those by Gardner (1995), Bright (2003), and Barnabas and Peter (2013), among others. Furthermore, researchers like Ferris and Williams (2005) tackled names from another perspective by studying place-names.

In addition, there are studies related to animal names under the name of zoonymics. These studies focused on two areas: the scientific names of animals, and the names which people use to address the animals. Bolatovna and Maratovna (2013) explained how zoonymics is a special branch of onomastics that deals with animals' names with reference to their appearance, development, functions, and attitudes. They also mention that naming animals is not something new. For instance, in Greek mythology, there were different names given to different specific animals such as Cerberus, the name for the three-headed angry dog that guards the entrance to Hades, and Pegasus is the name for the winged horse. All throughout history, there have been other well-known animal names, such as King Arthur's favorite dog, Cabal, and Isaac Newton's dog, Diamond.

Moreover, Hideaki (2003) examined and compared the vernacular names, usages, and attributes given to plants and animals by farmers and hunters. His study was conducted between two groups or tribes, namely the Efe and the Mbuti, who used two different languages. However, many names, usages, and attributes of plants and animals were common to both tribes. Moreover, they named animals, mainly birds, depending on specific strategies, such as onomatopoetic names. For instance, both groups had at least eight names that come from the call of the birds leading Hideaki to state that there was a strong tie between the name of a bird and its call.

Interestingly, Borkfelt (2011) traced the importance of generic and specificnaming connected to our relationships with non-humans. He examined names given to animals by scientists, keepers of animals, and the media. He found that naming was the first action in a language, and names represented values, ideas, and

perceptions. Furthermore, he posited that naming animals was restricted to humans because of language; consequently, it showed control over animals. It was the first act and the most important one in language. Finally, he concluded that naming things reflected our thoughts about animals and how keepers of an animal saw the animal; however, Heanre (2007) was against naming if naming was a kind of control or if it showed power over animals.

Scientists have also been interested in analyzing animal names and stating rules for naming themAllen (1896) claimed that these rules were first set by Strickland, the founder of the modern *Codes of Nomenclature*. These codes drew a picture of how different species should be named. These codes of rules for zoological nomenclature have changed throughout the years. For instance, its fifth edition started using the binomial nomenclature, but later editions used trinomials added to the codes for subspecies naming.

Nissan and Zuckermann (2011) analyzed Hebrew zoological terminology. They examined the occurrences of the neologization device of taking a place name or a personal name from the Hebrew Bible and reviving it semantically to denote a particular zoological taxon. For instance, a name for a station of the Exodus was revived by Abramowitsch (1866, quoted in Nissan and Zuckermann 2011) as a neologized name for *Mergus*, a member of the waterfowl genus.

Regarding the use of animal names for addressing people, Al-Jumaily and Hameed (2014) investigated their use in Iraq. They considered that Iraqi people used animal names to name their babies. Such names were used to refer to the animal's appearance, intelligence, and character. Moreover, Rybatzki (2012) observed Mongolian proper names. He found that proper names were related to physiological or psychological features like /batu/ 'confident' and /bajan/ 'rich'. He also found a group consisted of proper names taken from the names of animals such as birds, domestic animals, and horses. This group was considered the largest group of personal names.

To the authors' knowledge the only research that handled the process of giving names to animals was conducted by Babane and Chanke (2017) The main goal of their research was investigating the importance and the need of maintaining their dog-naming culture.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it will highlight animal naming practices and patterns, specifically pet cat names. Despite the significant rise and spread of onomastic studies in all its fields and branches, according to the researcher's knowledge, studies tackling animal names from a linguistic perspective have been limited. More recent studies have described animals' names but not the animals' given names. Therefore, investigating the naming practices and tendencies of cats, the naming patterns and types, and the various reasons people give for such naming will be the basis of this study.

Method

In order to carry on the investigation, a quantitative study was conducted using Facebook. The researcher first posted a question on the Facebook page, *Ask Jordan*. The question posed was: "If you have a cat, what is the name of the cat, and what is its kind?" After that, people who answered the question were sent a private message asking them if they would like to help in a study about cat names. those who agreed were instructed to answer a short questionnaire that consisted of five questions about the cat's name, gender, age, and kind. the questionnaire also contained questions about the reason for giving the cat that chosen name. There were 85 respondents who provided 100 cat names in total. Later, the data were analyzed and interpreted in tables, each of which was followed by a simple description and analysis. Cats' names were related to the reasons for giving the names for them and categorized into six groups.

Results and Discussion

In this section, different aspects of the collected names were analyzed and discussed. The data are tabulated into six tables and classified into six main categories based on their meaning and the reasons for the choice of the names given to the cats.

Names Referring to Appearances and Features

Many cats were named because of their outstanding physical features; the names in this section are related to their colours, attitudes, characters or shapes. The participants chose names that refer to the cat's appearance where the name is a colour, an adjective, or a kind of food that would describe the cat's appearance. Table 1 below presents some of these names connected to cats' appearances.

Moreover, most cats in this table are purebred cats, but a few are stray ones. The former are cultivated varieties of cats that people usually buy from a pet store, while the latter are socialized cats that used to be domesticated but were abandoned or got lost. So they do not live in homes but could potentially become domesticated over time.

Table 1. Names Referring to Cats' Appearances and Features

Name	Appearance	Type of Cat
Snowy	white cat	purebred cat
Milky	white cat	purebred cat
Ɂutne (*cotton*)	white cat	purebred cat
Pepper	black cat	purebred cat
Filfil (*pepper*)	black cat	both
Ɂiz ͡ʒa (*nigella sativa*)	Black cat	purebred cat
Oreo	black cat on outside and white from underside	purebred cat
Smoky	grey cat	purebred cat
FustuɁ (*peanut*)	light brown cat	purebred cat
Mishmish (*apricot*)	light orange cat	purebred cat
Cookies / Biscuit	beige coloured cat	purebred cat
Tinny	skinny cat	purebred cat
Kalbu:z (*fat*)	fat cat	purebred cat
Nasi ͡ʒ (*fat*)	fat cat	both
Kalbuz (*fat*)	fat cat	purebred cat
Batata (*potato*)	fat cat	stray cat
Panini	looks like loaf of bread	purebred cat
Fluffy	hairy cat	purebred cat
Tabfa ͡ʒ (*fat*)	fat cat	purebred cat
Ɂabu: alsakasi:k	with long hair on his chin	stray cat
aɣbar (*dusty*)	full of dust and dirt	stray cat
Mhawesh (*fighter*)	strong cat	stray cat
Shara:rah (*sparkle*)	strong cat	stray cat
Sha:di (*soft & kind*)	has a soft voice	purebred cat
ʕatri:s (*ugly*)	ugly cat	stray cat

The semantic meanings of the names mentioned in Table 1 illustrate that people named their cats based on their appearances, such as their colour or shape or even character. For example, if we look at white cats, we notice that the owners tended to give them names that correspond to white things, such as snow, where five cats were named 'Snowy'. 'Milky' was also given to two white cats. 'Ɂutne' *Cotton* was given to two white cats as well.

 If we look at black cats, we notice that 'Pepper' and its Arabic equivalent 'Filfil' were popular names for black cats, with two cats named 'Pepper' and three ones being named 'Filfil'. Interestingly, one black cat was named after the black seeds of a flower 'iz ͡ʒa' *Nigella sativa*.Furthermore, as was the case of two cats in this study, if the cats were black with some white on their chest and belly, the owners tended to name them 'Oreo' after the famous black and white sandwich cookies. Additionally, grey cats were called 'Smokey', as was the case with five cats. Likewise, two light brown cats were named 'Fustu' *peanut* because it resembled the peanuts' light brown colour. Five cats were named 'Mishmish' *apricot* because of their light orange colour. Finally, beige-coloured cats were called 'Cookie' or 'Biscuit' for obvious reasons.

Moving on to the relationship between a cat's appearance and its name, what applies to colours applies to shapes. For instance, fat cats were named 'Kalbu:z', 'Nasiʃ', or 'Kalbu' - all terms in Arabic mean *fat*. 'Batata' *potato* and 'Tabfaʃ' were also chosen for two more fat cats. As shown in Table 1, there was a cat called 'Panini' because its shape resembled a loaf of bread. Interestingly, the only skinny cat was called 'Tinny'. Finally, there were three cats that were quite hairy and accordingly named 'Fluffy'. The name 'ʿabualsakasi:k' was given to a cat with long hair in the chin. The Arabic term 'saksukeh' means the small beard on one's chin. The name 'ʿaṭbar' *dusty* was given to a dirty cat full of dust.

As far as the character is concerned, 'Mhawesh' *fighter* and 'Shara:rah' *sparkle* were given to cats that were aggressive and strong. 'Sha:di', the Arabic male name that reflects a soft and kind character, was given to a cat with a soft voice. 'ʿatri:s' *ugly* was given to an ugly cat.

Names Referring to Famous Characters

Table 2 below shows that some Jordanian people named their cats after famous movie and cartoon characters as well as sport celebrities.

Table 2. Names After Famous Characters

Name	Reason	Type of Cat
Luka	cartoon character	purebred cat
Lulu kiti	cartoon character	purebred cat
Simsim	cartoon character	purebred cat
Sharshour	cartoon character	stray cat
Harhour	cartoon character	stray cat
ʕabsi	cartoon character	both
Ben	cartoon character	purebred cat
Caesar	cartoon character	purebred cat
Cleo	cartoon character	purebred cat
Putchi	cartoon character	purebred cat
Sanfour	cartoon character	stray cat
Rambo	movie character	stray cat
Shaki:ra	singer	purebred cat
Shahi:ra	Shakira's sister	purebred
Schmeichel	football player	purebred cat
Karkar	movie character	stray cat
Samahir	T.V. character	both
Undertaker	wrestler	stray cat

For instance, 'Schmeichel' was a cat named after a kid's favorite Danish footballer and goalkeeper 'Kasper Schmeichel'. On the other hand, 'Rambo' was a crazy stray cat that jumped from one building to another and moved fast and dexterously. For that reason, a person named it 'Rambo' after the famous movie character. 'Karkar' was a funny, stupid, and stray cat that used **to fall while walking and was therefore named after** the comedian 'Karkar' from a movie. In addition, a cat was named 'Shakira' after the famous singer. Another was named 'Shahira' after Shakira's sister's name. Finally, three cats were named 'Samahir' after a T.V. character because the cats were crafty and wicked like Samahir's character in the television show. The name 'Undertaker' was given to a stray cat after the famous wrestler.

Moreover, many cats had the same names as cartoon characters because people of different ages liked to name their cats after cartoon characters. For instance, adults chose names from characters of the old cartoons they used to watch when they were young, like 'Simsim', 'Harhour', 'Sharshour', 'Sanfu:r', and 'Putchi'. Most of these names used to refer to animal characters except for 'Simsim' and 'Sanfu:ur'.

From the children's view, the names of their cats were taken after their favourite cartoon characters, which could be human such as 'Ben' and 'Luka' or a cat such as 'Lulu' and 'Kitty'.

'Caesar' and 'Cleo' were also names of cartoon characters chosen for two purebred cats. 'ʿabsi' was a name of an Arabic cartoon character which was given to two cats one of which was stray and the other was purebred.

Children's cats were purebred ones while most adults' cats were stray ones except 'Putchi', which was a small white dog character in a famous cartoon called Bill and Sebastian. 'Putchi' was a beautiful tiny cartoon dog compared to the other cartoon wicked wolves such as 'Harhour' and 'Sharshour'.

Finally, there are two collocates Arabic names presented in Table 2 'ʕantar' and 'ʕabla'. These names have a collocation in that they occurred together three times. The owners of 'ʕabla' usually had another cat or dog named 'ʕantar'. For clarification, 'ʕantar' and 'ʕabla' are names of two famous characters in the Arabic Literature, who were in love.

Classical or Traditional Cat Names

Some participants chose traditional names for their cats, as shown in Table 3 below. The table presents the most commonly used names for cats in Amman-Jordan. People in this case just gave the cat a traditional name because they liked it and considered it a common name for cats.

Table 3: Classical or Traditional Cat Names

Name	Type of Cat
Lusi	purebred
Kitty	purebred
Lulu	purebred
Tasha	purebred
Lula	purebred
Bussi	stray
Sophie	purebred
zaʕtar	purebred
thyme	
Sisi	stray
Sooty	stray
Zajt	purebred
oil	
Nasha	stray

The most common names chosen for cats were 'Lusi' and 'Kitty'. Five cats were called by those names; on the other hand, 'Lulu' was the next most common name with four cats possessing such a name. The third most popular names for cats were 'Tasha', 'Lula', 'Bussi', and 'Sophie'. Three cats were named 'zaʕtar' *thyme*. Only two cats were named 'Sisi', and only two other cats were named 'Zajt' *oil*. 'Sooty' was given to two stray cats. Finally, there was only one cat named 'Nasha'.

Finally, there are two common Arabic cat names presented in Table 3. These names have a collocation. In other words, 'zajt' *oil* and 'zaʕtar' *thyme* occurred together. The owners of these cats would have two cats one 'zaʕtar' and the other 'zajt'. 'zajt' *oil* and 'zaʕtar' *thyme* are considered as binomials in the Arabic language.

It is interesting to note that most cats' names started with an /s/ sound. Noticing this pattern, the researchers asked the participants about this phenomenon. The participants clarified that the pet shop owners from where they got their cats told them that cats distinguished and recognized their names better if they ended with /iː/ or they had the /s/ sound.

Names referring to a Specific Occasion

This category is related to the people who like animals and work as volunteers for some of the animal welfare societies in Jordan. These people save animals, mainly cats, and dogs. For instance, if they find a cat in terrible conditions, whether purebred or stray, they help it, heal it, give it a name and then start to look for someone to adopt it.

Table 4 below illustrates some names given to the saved cats with the reason for each name. Such names were related to the circumstances where the owner found or rescued the cat.

Table 4: Names after Specific Occasion

Name	Reason	Type of Cat
Hope	hopeful survival	stray cat
Hero	heroic survival	stray cat
May	found in May	purebred cat
Ikea	found near Ikea Store	purebred cat
Chance	chance to survive	purebred cat
Angel	angelic survival	purebred cat

For instance, 'Ikea' was a baby cat found alone without its mother near the Ikea Store on the Airport Road in Amman. 'May' was named after the month in which another cat was found.

A cat was named 'Hero' because it was injured, and it was not sure the cat would live; however, because it survived its harrowing ordeal, the owners decided to call it 'Hero'. The same goes for 'Chance', who was given

another chance to live after having survived a terrible sickness. 'Angel' had a similar story. Its owner believed the animal was surrounded by angels when it was unsure if the cat would live or die. Finally, there was 'Hope', who like the other cats mentioned above, was given hope to survive, so the owner chose to name it 'Hope'.

Cat Names after Owner's Relatives, Friends or Neighbours

Owners, sometimes, choose names of their relatives, friends or even neighbours to give to their cats. Tables 5 below shows different cat names given after someone the owners knew such as a friend, a relative or a neighbour.

Table 5: Names after Owners' Relatives, Friends or Neighbours

Name	Reason	Type of cat
Sarah	a name that a girl wants to give to her sister if she has one	purebred
ʔabu: anas	a name for someone who he used to know	purebred
ʔumbassam	neighbour's name	purebred
Naʕi:m	Cousin's name	purebred
Naʕi:m Junior	son of Naʕi:m	purebred
Salwa	a sister's name	stray cat
ħasan	a friend's name	purebred
Naddu:sh	a girlfriend's name	purebred
Anna	a relative's name	purebred
Ṣubħi	a friend's name	purebred

For example, 'ħasan' and 'Ṣubħi' were names of the owners' friends, while 'ʔabu: anas' and 'ʔumbassa:m' were names of the owners' neighbors. 'Nnaʕi:m' was the name of the owner's cousin, and 'Nnaʕi:m Junior' was given to the cat's son (Nnaʕi:m's son). 'Sarah' was given to a cat not after an actual relative. The owner wished she had had a sister named 'Sarah', and called her cat 'Sarah'. 'Salwa was given to a stray cat after the owner's sister. 'Naddu:sh' was given to another cat after the owner's girlfriend. Finally, 'Anna' was given to a cat after one of the owner's relatives.

Common Jordanian nicknames

This last category has something to do with common Jordanian nicknames. Very few names were chosen without any particular reason. These were also included in this category. Table 6 below shows the various nicknames and those names chosen with no specific reason.

Table 6: Nick Names or Names with no Specific Reason

Name	Reason	Type of Cat
Nata:sha	no reason	stray cat
Nevertiti	no reason	purebred cat
Ramiz	to collocate with Ramziyeh	stray cat
Ramziyeh	no reason	stray cat
Sophie	no reason	purebred cat
Lilian	nickname	purebred cat
Emmy	nickname	purebred cat
ʔumħusein	no reason	stray cat
ʔabu: Samrah	nickname	stray cat
ʔumʕamaṢ	no reason	stray cat
Hammu:lah	nickname	stray cat
Nafnu:f	nickname	purebred cat
Katku:t	nickname	purebred cat
Basbu:s	nickname	purebred cat
Nammu:r	nickname	purebred cat
Lu:lu:	nickname	purebred cat
Bu:bu:	no reason	purebred cat
⚑adi:dʒah	no reason	stray cat
Fatħi	no reason	stray cat

Faṭḥiyeh	to collocate with Fathi	stray cat

Table 6 shows that nine of the 20 cats were given names with no specific reason. Their owners chose such names simply because they liked them. On the other hand, the rest of the chosen names were either common Jordanian nicknames or English ones. Interestingly, stray cats were given Arabic or Jordanian nicknames such as 'Ḥadi:ʘeh', 'ʕabusama:rah', 'ʔumḥusein', 'Faṭḥi' and 'Ramziyeh'. Other nicknames like 'Lilian', 'Basbu:s', 'Nafnu:f', 'Bu:bu:', 'Lu:lu:', and the like were given to purebred cats. Names that collocate together like 'Ramiz' 'Ramziyeh' and 'Faṭḥi' 'Faṭḥiyeh' were given to stray cats. Two of the owners had cats named 'Ramziyeh' and 'Faṭḥi'. Later, they got two other cats, so they chose 'Ramiz' and 'Faṭḥiyeh' to name the new cats because they commonly go with the first ones in Arabic.

It is worth noticing that ten of the 20 cats were stray. Nine of them were given Arabic nicknames. Conversely, the rest were purebred cats and were given Arabic and English nick names most of which had the long vowel /u:/ in the last syllable**.**

Conclusion

This study explored the names given to cats in Amman and the reason for giving these names. Collecting and analyzing the most frequent cat names showed that cat names could be categorized and have semantic indications. People do not choose names haphazardly. Instead, they have reasons for these names. Cats could be named according to their appearances or features. They could also be named after owners' relatives, friends, neighbours or even after cartoon or movie characters. They could have familiar and common names for cats. In addition, cats could be named according to a specific occasion. The study also showed that certain Jordanian and foreign nicknames were given to a number of cats. The names of very few cats were given without any particular reason. Cats were given such names simply because the owners liked them.

Recommendations

It is recommended further future studies be conducted to investigate cats' names from different areas in Jordan. It is also recommended further studies be conducted on cats' names in other countries to find out if different cultures may affect the choice of cats' names.

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Author Information

Maisa S. Jaber	**Hana A. Daana**
Princess Alia University College	Princess Alia University College
Al-Balqa Applied University	Al-Balqa Applied University
Amman- Jordan	Amman- Jordan