

ANTHROPONYMS AS (CONVENTIONAL OR UNCONVENTIONAL) PARTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Some of the popular debates in the history of linguistics are related to the relationship between form and meaning. I chose only two of them for this paper. The first relates to the famous debate *physis – nomos*, with another debate in parallel, between analogy and abnormality. The second refers to the potential of a language to meet the endless demands of different cultures and mentalities despite its limited resources.

At a first glance, it seems that personal names are a typical example of conventional relationships between different societies, in terms of their joint function as markers (indicators). Parallels will be drawn between this function of names and parts of speech (as finite, similar units in all languages). What changes across languages is the ability of human beings to express themselves through what is considered finite. For this reason, one may believe that an unconventional relationship cannot be excluded in anthroponymy. Personal names are the best example to gain insight into various realities, different cultures and mentalities. As Humboldt said, “The language of a people is its soul, and its soul is its language”.

Earlier debates concluded that language displays certain regularity. Aristotle said that language reflects what the soul feels, while writing reflects language. For the development of language, we have to contribute to these regularities. On the other hand, we have to understand that as long as there is human life, diverse perspectives of looking at the world will always exist.

Keywords: personal names, conventional/unconventional, language, development.

From the beginning, it is appropriate to recall the first thoughts about language, by combining them with current uses of language. We concentrate our attention on two important debates regarded as two parallel debates on the relationship between form and meaning, recalling briefly some information about them. The former relates to the famous debate *physis – nomos*, the latter with the parallel debate between analogy and anomaly. As we know, these debates have been referred to by different scholars, but for a more precise inclusive and chronological orientation, we have selected the results provided by Robert Robins in *History of Linguistics* (translated by Genc Lafe, Tirana; 2007: 25–110).

The debate about the relationship between words, their meanings and language

origin has had its beginning in the early Greek antiquity. It became one of the dominant debates of the Platonic dialogues. The debate originated with pre-Socratic philosophers and later Sophists. It consisted in the fact that the relationship between words and their meanings is the relationship that is built on the basis of a natural affinity or the result of agreement between people. Thus, the controversy nature – agreement appeared.

The supporters of the *natural origin* paid attention to nature and according to them the first sounds imitated things. In their opinion, etymology pays more attention to the importance of the primal forms of the words in which they seek the origins of human language and onomatopoeia and overall sound symbolism occurred in the phonological structure of some words. According to these supporters, primal forms of the words have changed significantly. Against this debate, there is the predominant view about the arbitrary relationship whose center is an agreement between form and meaning – a tacit, unspoken agreement, like the social agreement seen as the basis of social organization (Robins 2007: 42).

Aristotle's thought coincides with the view of agreement in language: "language is an agreement, because names do not exist in nature". Stoics supported the natural birth of language. Opposing opinions between Aristotle and the Stoics paved the way for the second ancient language opposition between *analogy* and *anomaly*. Thus, the question of *regularity* or *irregularity* in the creation of language arose. Aristotle was supportive of analogy, while the Stoics saw anomaly as the main cause of language creation. According to Aristotle, the more regularity an arbitrary, conventional communication system displays, the higher its effectiveness is. Stoics regarded language as a natural human skill which must be accepted as it is, together with its irregularities. In all this debate three main issues were etymology, phonetics and grammar (Robins 2007: 42–48).

After the introductory paragraphs, we will deal with the aforementioned issues in relation to *personal names*. Early and later debates come to help us argue some important issues in the field of anthroponomy, especially in the context of the establishment of personal names. Our names are a clear evidence of the meeting point between early debates (*physis – nomos, analogy – anomaly*) and later debates, in the center of which is the fact that the ability of language to meet the constant demands of different cultures and mentalities (through its limited resources) is infinite. Personal names serve above all as an argument for intersections that exist between linguistic and extralinguistic phenomena, between nature and convention.

After these interpretations, some questions arise:

- Is (was) the process of establishing personal names natural?
- Are (were) personal names the fruit of an agreement?
- Are (were) personal names based on analogy?
- Are (were) personal names based on anomaly?

After the frequent reversal of these debates to this day in the form of a continuum, another question that continues to connect the two ends of the debates is the following:

- Has this process fulfilled (does it still fulfill and will it continue to fulfill) the repeated requests of the various societies (in mentality, cultural level, development, therefore in needs and desires, views of the world, etc.)? Will the ability to set personal names be endless in the course of time?

Sociolinguistics considers these are rhetorical questions. Below we list all the possible reasons associated with appropriate explanations why their answer is self-evident.

We quote Robins' thought who calls the controversy *nature – agreement* not productive: "language is an universal skill for every normal human being and it is not possible to determine a scale between different languages, in terms of complexity, internal order and the ability to express a culture" (Robins 2007: 41). This quote brings to mind the language problems in which the later debates are initially encountered, and it also reminds us of their continuous reoccurrence in the light of subsequent language developments. The main object of the debates discussed above is related to the search of the cause of the creation of human language. Robins' opinion is in itself the answer to all related questions.

In the context of our paper, the aforementioned questions receive a special importance because they show that language existed as such since the very beginning, whether we consider it a convention or not. A very strong argument to prove this has always been the establishment of personal names. The need to call a person, conventionally or not, has existed since our birth and the birth of humanity itself.

There is always a connection or relationship between the name correctly placed and the reason why it was set, which is why we need to understand what kind of relationship it is. The reason for the establishment of a name is closely associated with the cultural level, the degree of emancipation, the level of intelligence, desire, passion, trust and everything else that may have left a mark on a particular individual or on individuals who are parents. Certainly, though individual, the relationship between the name and the reason for its deployment is also social, even when there is a strong link with the world of the individual, (his/her life), it would be nonexistent if it were not recognized by the society the moment when the name was given and not only. However, the choices that some individuals make in a specific moment do not do anything but stamp certain realities beyond time.

From all of this filing, it is self-evident that no one calls a newborn baby something because it needs a name as an *indicator, a neutral mark* that just *shows* the respective *distinguished* person. Although initially these names are placed conventionally, by agreement, they are always based on a kind of meaning which gives importance to the secondary semantic reading that obviously is not related to the naming, but the reason why the individual is called in a certain way.

On the other hand, the personal name, premeditated, associated with a strong motive, important in its kind, tied to a specific and quite subjective reason, not conventional etc., will coexist with the individual and *will slowly dissolve in time, turning into a form, in an initial sense, in a convention*. Only in certain situations can the name become the object of meditation for the interlocutor. For example, when the name is special and therefore becomes the subject of conversation or when a personal name previously

belonged to a beloved relative etc. Only in a few special cases can we bring back to our memory its meaning.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, names turn in time in a convention, although they may individually receive a social dimension, because in the first place they serve as indicators in the society and then they become symptomatic of the mentality of a society and not only. A name is also an indicator of culture and history.

Therefore, at this point we will turn our attention from individual speakers to speaking communities, in which individuality and solidarity alternate their positions. Chain links are created in this process: content – form – content, non-convention – convention – non-convention, analogy – anomaly – analogy, and so on.

According to these generalizations, it is clear that personal names should be considered on two important levels: on the *individual* and *societal* level. Such an outcome leads to detailed research in both individual and social terms, sometimes even about both aspects simultaneously (intertwined), when the matter takes time to deliver from one to the other. Throughout this process, the most important fact is that the relationship between these two aspects is convergent.

In our first study dedicated to personal names (Troplini 2013: 712–713) we said:

Personal names form a special class of words (Kurylovicz 1962, quoted in Lloshi 1969: 165). Names cannot have a primary meaning and an orderly semantic development as other words do (Nadel 1955: 153, 166). A name becomes an indicator, a neutral sign, which only shows and distinguishes a relevant person, but does not have a specific meaning content (Huismann 1961: 362).

In the lexicon of a language, names are separated from other words and cannot be included in a common comprehensive dictionary, *because proper nouns need no explanation* (Çiçagov 1959: 8, quoted in Lloshi, *ibidem*). Changes of proper nouns are different from those of ordinary words. An ordinary word cannot undergo a change that breaks the union between form and the content, whereas the transition from *Victoria* to *Vito*, from *Qeramudin* in *Qamo*, *Agron* in *Goni* does not pose any risks.

In this regard, personal names seen only within the linguistic structure appear to function, then, just as a convention. But are names truly a convention? Of course they are, and this is not simply through the fact that one day they return to being a convention. An individual conventionally decides the name of a newborn baby, but s/he does so depending on the spiritual world, the emotional load, cultural level, all being reasons that push him/her to choose a name and explanations of the meaning of that name. The connection that the latter has with what below follows we will call non-convention.

If we refer to a parallel debate, we would add that in a totally analogue way different societies, based on a variety of external factors, give names to people. Let us explain this in more detail.

Thus, through an agreement we establish personal names based on the principle of regularity within a family, family circle or small community of which we live, inside the social group to which we belong, within a social community or several social

communities etc. – the process of giving names is the same for all: it is done with the agreement that somebody be named in relation to a secret inner agreement that must be adapted to the circle to which we belong. This allows us to see personal names from the perspective of analogy.

Nonetheless, as already mentioned, what changes in this process refers to the different ways of conceiving the world. The process of personal names brings to mind the theory of cultural and linguistic relativity (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), because it is closely associated with the culture, mentality and development of a community. It is this reason that makes this process different for all different communities. At this point, we must acknowledge that this not only holds for analogy, but also for anomaly.

We might also add that although there was much talk about personal names on the individual and social level, their operational radius goes beyond that. For example, we know that many scholars see the issue of personal names as a national issue. Some reviews of the personal names of the Albanian language say that the *history of people's names is an integral part of the culture and history of the language spoken by the people* (Daka 1981: 105; Shpuza 1998: 147; see also Troplini 2013).

Underlining a fact that was previously stated by early researchers, we can say that the very history and culture of a nation are reflected through language. Çabej says that *the history of a language is the story of the people who speak it* (Çabej 1976). Moreover, we know that culture is part of language, but also exceeds it (Shkurtaj 2009).

Regarding the secondary meaning of these names we can say that it is different not only for different social communities, but even within the same community, according to different social groups. It varies according all sociolinguistic variables such as status, profession, role, religion, age, sex, class, ethnicity, education and so on.

Accordingly, they receive importance due to many significant social issues that interact in language and have a direct link with personal names. We have chosen to expand a little upon one of them: *linguistic prejudice*.

Linguistic prejudice has existed in all ages and, of course, is closely related to a specific viewpoint of a social community. The field of linguistic prejudice is a very good argument to update the theory of linguistic and cultural relativity (Sapir-Whorf) in different languages and cultures, with all the problems that this theory may have. We think that such a topic would deserve to be developed in a separate study.

The link between the field of linguistic prejudice and personal names is fairly salient. Among other things, the field of linguistic prejudice is very wide. Certain kinds of prejudices are recognized and motives or reasons for these prejudices are varied, but in all cases *linguistic prejudice stems from a kind of deficit that is created between two parties.*

The most evident example of the birth of linguistic prejudices among individuals is associated with the contradiction that exists between different time stages. There is always a contradiction that arises due to the time factor. Because of the latter, a gap is created from the moment of name giving until the time of its use in society. In this respect, conflicts arise between different generations and, therefore, different views of the world emerge.

It often happens that children are subject to prejudice just because their name rhymes with the name of an animal that children do not like or a word that is not very pleasant, even though the name has a positive meaning. Such a thing leads to psychological consequences for children, who feel discriminated by their peers. This is why bearing the name of one's grandparents or great-grandparents may not give a person great pleasure.

In such cases and many others of the kind, it frequently happened that the individual knowingly changed his/her personal name. Such a phenomenon may occur at any ages. In an adult, this happens due to the complex that a person may develop in relation to himself/herself and, above all, to what others think of him/her. In the Albanian society, it often goes unnoticed that these names change in time. Thus, for example, it happened that even for an intellectual the name *Mustafa* was considered (by society) as an obsolete name, because its use belongs to another generation and it was immediately changed to *Martin*. Similar transformations occurred in the case of other names: *Muhamed – Met*, *Mahmud – Maks*, *Aqif – Ari* and others. These names are unjustly considered by a large part of society as backward. These examples (and many others like them) show, first and foremost, a big lack of culture, starting with a complex generated by one's care about what the society thinks of him/her. One could also mention here that the cultural deficit is due to the lack of religious culture. Not practicing a religion is a free choice of the individual, but not having an intellectual religious knowledge is a lack of culture.

The self-conscious change of a name as a complex may also come as a simple consequence of the objection to that first name, as may be the case of changing the name from *Miranda* to *Mira* (examples of this are many and vary by individuals). Even such cases are related to social prejudice. As we have seen, a case of this kind pertains to onomatology and especially sociolinguistics and has to do with the secondary traits of a names; the issue of prejudice is one of the motives for the establishment of these traits (for more information on secondary traits of personal names, see Troplini 2013).

In all the cases above, one of the parties is always prejudiced in relation to the other, until the individual himself/herself achieves to overcome this kind of deficit promoted by the community, class, culture and level of education to which he belongs.

We are going to highlight the difference according to economic class in Albania, as it reflects another difference (Troplini 2010). We have no significant differences in terms of economic class. Even if there had been differences from the material point of view, certainly in Albania the richer layer in income is poorer in mentality, intellect and culture. Such a difference can be read as a parallel distinction between citizens and the peasant class (peasants and urban folk) mainly before the 90s. Seen in this regard, names in urban areas have always been more controlled in rate and mostly contemporary. In rural areas, religious names were predominant, although they were considered outdated by the society and were given because of tradition rather than faith. Extraspelling of names also occurred.

However, it must be said that personal names of previous generations in the

Albanian society were much more balanced as regards their meaning; at least their first reading was understandable. Personal names before the 90s were accompanied by a kind of freedom, the goal of which was also notable for the fact that we were under dictatorship and foreign names were automatically excluded. On the other hand, now we witness the other extreme: the limit has almost become invisible. Today, in the course of globalization, the Albanian language is misunderstood. Its bastardization through the use of foreign words, the violation of the language structure according to foreign models mainly from English and Italian has occasionally been treated as Albanian undergoing globalization and, as a result, as Albanian in development, evolution. That cannot be true, because we all know that this is not what development in a language means. However, liberty in language is undeniable. Below you will see how far this kind of freedom goes for our personal names.

In ordinary discourse, the speaker *produces new forms of language*. We are all aware of *the invaluable capability* of language, which derives precisely from this fact, the fact that language is an endless ability of human beings. On the other hand, Chomsky does not consider the endless ability as infinite freedom. He sees or uses as a limit specifically the situation: *the common use of language, therefore, is free and unlimited, but always in accordance with the situations*, known (felt) as needed by the other participants in the speaking situation, who may react similarly and their opinions, prompted by this situation may correspond to those of the speaker (Chomsky 1988: 5).

Even in the process of establishing personal names, the freedom has a limit, which in our case should be controlled by the so-called *social rules*. If for Chomsky the situation is the one which ultimately limits, for personal names the taste of a particular society at a specific time is limiting. On the other hand, we are aware that at this point it is more difficult to follow the rules of the official language, which, although very important, are knowingly violated, as time has shown.

Although the deployment of foreign names may constitute a violation of the rules of the language of a nation, we find them in Albanian and therefore in any language. If we wanted to deepen this matter and even refer to norm violations, there is a difference according to sociolinguistic variables. Thus, for example, if we were to make a distinction between the educated parents and those without education, though in both cases we are dealing with violations, the first ones prefer characters in books or known characters in science and culture, while the latter prefer soap opera characters.

Throughout this process, it is very difficult to respect *the rules of the society*. The selection of personal names in Albania has shown that it is often achieved in violation not only of the language, but also of the social rules. Examples of such violations can be considered *any deviation from tradition*. In cases in which these deviations have become uncontrollable, they have been associated with subjective temporary out-breaks inspired by a particular situation.

Every society is governed by special tastes not similar to one other. Thus, after the 90s (after the dictatorship) in the Albanian society two trends led to the establishment of personal names. One has to do with the thirst for using foreign names (a trend that

wanes day by day); the other is related to another violation of the norm, namely the unions of names or letters to other family members (parents, sisters or brothers). As separate groups, we can also consider Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic names; names given in the memory of any human relatives (not alive); mainly Albanian Illyrian names (or at least those in the Albanian language) and others.

In addition to all these subdivisions (which may be even more numerous), what is important is the fact that all these groups of names are united by a *common trend: the tendency for these names to be contemporary in our society, for them to satisfy the taste of the moment, which is different for different countries and communities.*

Therefore, a Christian or Muslim religious individual, instead of a name with a strong religious significance, prefers a less meaningful name for his/her child only to be in agreement with the general taste. Specifically instead of the name *Ymer* nowadays the name *Omar* is preferred, which is basically the same, but the first belongs to an elderly generation, while the second not (it is considered western). Even with regard to this group, there is a difference between generations. So, instead of names of the older generation, such as *Rahman, Kadrije, Haki, Isa* and others, there is a preference for names like *Omar, Hedi, Erdi, Ensar, Belkisa, Enes, Amla, Ajla* and *Erin*. These names are many. On the other hand, we can mention religious names like *Kristi* and *Kristel* for the same reasons. To understand somehow what the preferences of the Albanian society today are in establishing personal names, we provide some examples of personal names: *Aleksa, Alesio, Amelia, Ani, Aselmo, Aurora, Avi, Donald, Ega, Elkida, Endri, Enida, Enri, Era, Eralb, Erigels, Erisa, Eriselda, Erjon, Ersar, Ersi, Fabio, Gerald, Geri, Gloria, Grei, Irisi, Joeli, Katelina, Kejsi, Kleda, Klevi, Kresi, Lorena, Lorin, Luis, Marsilda, Maurisio, Noemi, Orges, Petro, Saidi, Santa, Sara, Serena, Sindi, Uesla, Vanesa, Viki, Xhulia*, and others. All these names have to do with the so-called taste of the time. This list includes names of children aged 3–12. It shows the mentality of name-giving in our Albanian reality today; referring to the state of Albania, once the situation of establishing the names in the ethnic territories was more sensitive to the aforementioned violations.

There is yet another kind of difference between today's personal names and personal names of 20 years ago. Let us say that the same tradition of name-giving has continued, but we need to exclude a group of people, mostly educated ones, which slowly spread through their example the tradition of giving mainly names showing origin. We exclude here religious practitioners (Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox), who see it as an obligation to give a meaningful name and mainly one that belongs to their religion. We also exclude some rare cases, in which there is a reversal of the names of people close to the family. Generally, however, there prevails the trend of giving names that come mainly from unions of letters, foreign names or internal creations perhaps without any meaning. We might also add that names in all subdivisions are adapted with specific tastes of the time that although has no name, is self understandable, is recognized by all and has its own originality. This constitutes a clear sign of the triumph of conformism.

As noted by the statement of names, our internal tastes in matters of name-giving

are somewhat incomprehensible and sometimes subjective explosions are so strong that they go beyond any norm. However, it is important that at all times these types of explosions have been short-term. Even in our society this trend is going downward. It significantly started the awareness for meaningful names.

Despite this bitter fact, we all know that when the situation of a community changes, its mentality also changes; therefore, it is sometimes improved and sometimes worsened and in the end the awareness against wrong forms always wins, because development always dominates.

Nowadays, the awareness to improve the selection of names is significantly felt. The preference for Albanian names or names of any sort, but which at least have meaning, has begun to be felt. However, in our country, in this regard much has to be done.

According to these facts, it is understandable that personal names occasionally vary differently at different times. Aristotle said that *language reflects what the soul feels, while writing reflects language*. In support of this the analogy to rules can be mentioned. However, although subjectivity is always part of the language (especially following the 60s), rules are always paid attention to, if not standard rules, the rules of the society, then those that an individual himself creates at a given time.

We quoted Chomsky earlier. He claimed that man is free, but acts in accordance with a specific situation. The sociolinguist says that individual speakers adjust their dialect with the social context, respecting at least social rules or the environmental standard (if one is in the right to call them so).

The human capacity to create is infinite, but always controlled by rules and laws, linguistic or social, spiritual or moral ones. *This constitutes the essential obstacle that we have called the limit*. The last is more visible for certain issues, for others it is less visible (such as for personal names), but it is always necessary. For a developed language we have to contribute to these inconsistencies, but on the other hand, we will have to understand that as long as there is human life, there will always be new perspectives and diverse points of views of the world. Throughout this process, it is important to stress the significance of form and content, of non-convention and convention, anomaly and analogy, irregularities and regularity, the creative ability and the respect of a limit (target). Regarding personal names, we think that the problem for a given society is the fact that violations go either towards reduction or towards dominance.

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