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Title of the article : From Tradition to Modernity: The Transformation of Turkish Pet Names

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From Tradition to Modernity: The Transformation of Turkish Pet Names

Abstract

As the traditional way of life has undergone a thorough change during the last few decades, the human-animal relationship in Türkiye has changed too. The traditional pet species and their roles as protectors, sources of food, or income for many people have been replaced with modern species and the pets' roles mostly converted into friends or family members. As a result of the change in traditional pets, the names given to pets also have changed.

In this article, I sought to answer the question “How have pets owned by Turkish people – and so the names given to them- changed during the last few decades?” The present article found that the traditionally owned pets apart from those raised for husbandry have changed from big ones to small ones physically like dogs. Besides; reptiles, rodents, and insects have turned into pets owned at home for their company. The names given to pets, in the same way, have changed. Modern names are quite different than traditional ones as personal names are given to pets as well as names in accordance with their physical features and unique names such as brand names, the occupation of the owner, or sometimes names just made up.

Keywords: Pets, name-giving, Türkiye, Turkish, tradition, modernity

Introduction

Humans and animals have had close relations since the beginning of humanity. Animals have served people as a means of transportation, as a source of food, as a source of several raw materials, as guards, and last but not least important of all they have accompanied humans as friends. Sometimes, animals have been so important to humankind that some nations have adopted them as totems while others have worshipped them. For example, Pettigrew (1834:170) writes about animal worship in ancient Egypt stating that several species were “respected and even worshipped by this people: quadrupeds, birds, amphibia, fishes, insects...” Likewise; Eom (2024) reviews snake worship in the Far East, and Krishna (2010) writes about animals worshipped in Hinduism.

Animals have been indispensable in the everyday lives of the Turkic peoples, as seen in the lives of almost all other peoples. While some of the animals were totems or regarded sacred and respected like tortoises (Alyılmaz 2013), owls (Köse 2019), elks/mountain goats (Üngör 2018), storks (Altier 2022), geese (Çandarlı Şahin 2022), others were raised for food as they had a way of life dependent on husbandry rather than agriculture due to the severe conditions of the environment, which can still be observed among the Turkic peoples of Inner Asia. Apart from husbandry, the Turkic peoples raised horses, especially to use them for

wars. According to Bıyıklı (2019), Turks were the first people to domesticate horses. Many researchers state that Central Asia/Eurasia was the first place where the horse was domesticated (Levine 2012; Lasota-Moskalewska, et al. 2009; Taylor et al. 2024; Librada et al. 2021; Outram et al. 2009). Sinor (1972) also emphasizes the importance of horses for the strength of the military of the Türk empires in Inner Asia.

As Turks started to settle down, particularly in present Türkiye, leaving the nomadic lifestyle, horses, in the same way, started to lose their importance and other pets replaced them. Perhaps, dogs were the first pets after the horses as they served as guards to protect the household or especially against wild animals to protect the herds. Cows, sheep, and goats, following in the footsteps of the past, have served as the main source of income for most families in rural areas, yet sometimes in suburban urban areas too. In modern city life, however, people have recently adopted animals for their company mostly as pets.

During the last few decades, pet ownership has gone up. For example, the number of pets in Europe increased by 9% between 2012 and 2018, reaching a total of 289 million (animalhealthurope.eu). The number of pets owned or adopted increased especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when almost people all over the world had to stay at home due to lockdowns. The number of pets adopted peaked during April-May 2020 worldwide (Ho; Hussain; Sparagona 2021). Similarly, the number of pets adopted during the pandemic in Türkiye increased dramatically (dha.com.tr; t24.com.tr; cum-huriet.com.tr). Since there are no exact statistics on pets in Türkiye, it is not easy to give the authentic number of dogs, cats, birds, or other pets. However, FEDIAF estimates in its 2022 *Facts & Figures Report* released in 2024 (europeanpetfood.org) that the dog population is 1,409,000; the cat population is 4,737,000; the bird population is 11,477,000; the number of aquaria is 864,000; The population of small mammals is 821,000; and the number of terraria is 160,000. According to the secretary general of Ankara Veterinarians Chamber, the total number of cats and dogs owned in Türkiye is about six million (avho.org.tr).

Since Turkish people, as is the case with all others, see their pets as a member of the family, they try hard to give them the best names. Since ancient times, Turkish people have given special names to their pets, regardless of their function. Most of those names, on the other hand, have started to change recently from traditional ones to modern ones.

Traditional Pet Names

Traditionally, pets/ animals have been given their names according to the physical traits of the animals, mostly in harmony with the color of their furs or hair. To illustrate, *karabaş* ‘black head’ has been one of the most common names for dogs as it designates a shepherd dog with a black head common in Türkiye. In the

veterinary literature, *karabaş* is the name for a group of shepherd's dogs in Türkiye (Yılmaz & Ertuğrul 2011; Atasoy et al. 2014). However, the name of a species of dog has been used as a proper name for pet dogs as well. Likewise, *sarı* 'yellow, blonde', *kahve* 'coffee, brown', and so on are the names of most dogs given according to the color of their hair. Besides the color of their hair, the physical appearances and the body shapes of dogs have led to names such as *Kocaman* 'huge', *Canavar* 'monster'.

The traditional names given to cats are not different from those given to dogs. Similar tendencies can be observed as well. For example, *tekir* 'tabby' is the name given to cats commonly. Though it designates a species of cats, most cats have been given this name regardless of their original species. The color of cats' hair has been, similarly, an important way of naming cats. *Sarman* 'yellow cat', *Pamuk* 'cotton', and *Kara* 'black' are the other common traditional names given to pet cats in Türkiye emphasizing the color of their hair. According to Aydın (2016:24), when naming pets or animals, the color, the physical structure of heads, horns, bodies, beards, behaviors, races, or the way they walk are some of the traditional/folkloric ways of pet-naming. Çağlar (2019) made a similar categorization of pet names in Turkic culture: names given according to the appearance, names related to the duty of animals, the character of animals, the color, and names taken from Turkic epics, especially for horses. The former two classifications are not quite different from that of Karakuş (1997:1145) in which the author states seven ways to name pets: "color, biological structure (birth deficiencies or body structure), character or the ability to move, the owner, age, species and gender, function." The naming practices above are true for all farm animals like cows, sheep, goats, etc.

Türkiye has undergone crucial social and political changes since the early 80's, when it adopted liberal economic policies, which, together with political developments, significantly had an influence on the lifestyles of Turkish people (Tarhan 2012; Uluç 2013; Aydılek & Büyükcü Kazkondur 2016; Özel 2016; Küçük 2019). Meanwhile, technological developments such as satellites, the Internet, social media, etc. have facilitated the communication and interaction of geographically remote people. As to the pets owned, these advancements all contributed to the diversity of pets kept at home. While dogs comprised a big portion of the pets in Türkiye half a century ago, today they are the third species owned by Turkish people as pets, as shown by a survey carried out by Twentify and Moofio (www.milliyet.com.tr). According to the survey, birds are the number one pet that people have in Türkiye with a ratio of 33% among all pets. Cats come second and dogs third, having ratios of 32% and 27% respectively. The ratio of rodents is 3% while the ratio of reptiles is 1%. The survey shows that Turkish people have started to have snakes, iguanas, hamsters, etc. as pets.

The change in the kinds of pets owned has led to the change in the names given to them. The names given to pets mostly due to their physical appearance have changed to such a great extent that many new pets' names have been observed.

Method

The present article aims to determine how modern lifestyle has influenced the pets owned in Türkiye and the names given to them. To this end, a face-to-face interview was employed. The author of the article had interviews with more than 400 people randomly, including friends and students at a state university in the west of Türkiye. Since the respondents come from different cities with different backgrounds and lifestyles, the findings of the research are supposed to reflect a common tendency for Turkish people. The following questions were asked to the participants:

- 1- Do you have a(ny) pet(s)?
- 2- Does your family have a(ny) pet(s)?
- 3- Why do you have a pet(s)?
- 4- What is/are the name(s) of your pet(s)?

The participants who answered the first and the second questions negatively, stating that they did not have pets, were excluded and the total number of participants turned out 229. Of the pets owned, 80 were dogs, 42 were cats, 37 were birds, 13 were fish, 12 were cows, 9 were turtles, 7 were rabbits, 6 were lambs, 4 were goats, 4 were chameleons, 3 were chicks, 2 were horses, 2 were roosters, 2 were snakes, 1 was a hamster, 1 was a goose, 1 was a duck, 1 was a spider, 1 was an iguana, and 1 was a caterpillar. The answers for the third question could be categorized into three groups: the first one was -192 answers- "I/We like them"; the second one was -24 answers- "I/We live in a village and farming and husbandry is our way of making a living"; and the last one was -13 answers- "Somebody (my friend/ a famous person/ a member of family, etc.) had a pet and upon seeing that I decided to have a pet." The answers to the fourth question will be discussed below.

Results

As a result of urbanization and peoples' living in apartments as well as young and single people's preferring to live alone and an increase in the age of first marriage (TAYİİA), traditional guard pets such as shepherd's dogs or hounds have been replaced by poodles, cairn terriers, Chihuahuas, etc. and so the names given to these species have changed greatly. The former names used for those big guards have changed into names that normally do not arouse the feeling of horror, but liking, softness, and cuteness. To illustrate, *cesur* 'brave', *ateş* 'fire', and *azman* 'monstrous' were some of the traditional names for dogs referring to their aggressive side and their big bodies, however, modern names show the delicacy,

smallness, and endearment comparable with their size: *tarçın* ‘cinnamon’, *kontes* ‘countess’, *badem* ‘almond’, *fincan* ‘cup’, *saçaklı* ‘fringed’, *karamel* ‘caramel’, and *daisy* are some of the names popular for small she-dogs.

The modern names given to cats show similar tendencies. They do not only reflect the physical appearance of cats, that is the color of their fur, but most of the time, the way they look and behave, and the psychology of their owners: *minnoş* ‘little darling’ a name to show the cat is small, sweet and under the protection of the owner. *Bıdık* ‘squat, tubby’ is a name to show that the cat is small and overweighed, but still cute. Some other modern names for cats are *kaşmir* ‘cashmere’, *lokum* ‘Turkish delight’, *şaşkın* ‘goofy’.

As mentioned above, a recent survey shows that birds –in general- are the number one pets owned in Türkiye. Budgies make most of the birds but some other species such as parrots, canary birds, and pigeons are also owned. The remarkable thing with the names of budgies is that practically all of the names contain the sounds “z”, “j”, “f”, “s”, “p”, “k” as the words containing these sounds help them learn to speak (evcilclub.com). Therefore, the most common names for male budgies are *çapkın* pronounced /tʃʌpkɯn/ meaning ‘debauchee’, *paşa* pronounced /paʃa/ meaning ‘general’, *şaşkın* pronounced /ʃʌʃkɯn/ meaning ‘goofy’. The same phonetic approach is also observed with the names of female budgies. The most common names are *sarışın* pronounced /sarɯʃɯn/ meaning ‘blonde’, *şila* pronounced /ʃilʌ/ ‘a female name in English’. However, this phonetic approach – though still widespread- is hardly valid for modern names. For example, *duman* ‘smoke’, *hamdi* ‘a personal (male) name’, and *nazlı* ‘coy’ and also a personal (female) name are some of the names that are new and different from the traditional ones.

The most striking thing, perhaps, with modern pets is that reptiles and rodents have become pets. Animals that people would be afraid to see, let alone touch, and have in their home a few decades ago, such as iguanas, snakes, mice, hamsters, etc. have turned into pets. Today, as the survey carried out by Twentify and Moofio mentioned above suggests, 3% of all pets are rodents and 1% are reptiles, which is also supported by this present research. Of the 229 pets, nine turtles, four chameleons, one hamster, one spider, one snake, one, caterpillar, and one iguana are owned as pets. As these are new to people, there are no traditional names for rodents and reptiles and this has led to unique names for those kinds of pets. For instance, *vosvos* (from the car Volkswagen) is the name of a turtle, *milka* (a chocolate brand) is the name of a snake, and *Haydar* - a personal (male) name- is the name of a tarantula.

Discussion

Over the last few decades, Türkiye has witnessed significant economic, social, and cultural change. More and more people have started to have pets at home

and new species and kinds have turned into pets. Since the kinds and species of animals owned as pets have become diverse so have the names given to them. People have started to give different and unique names to their pets as most parents do with their kids (Sakallı 2016). The names given to pets can be classified as follows:

1- Personal names

2- Physical traits

3- Others: names given just for the sake of being different and unique such as food names, famous brands, the owner's profession, etc.

Giving pets personal names is quite a new trend in Türkiye. Normally, calling a pet or an animal with a personal name was regarded as offensive but especially in the past few years, we have come across many personal names as pets' names. To the surprise of the author of this present article, 56 personal names were found in this research 35 of which were Turkish personal names while 21 were foreign personal names. This figure outnumbers the pets' names given according to their physical traits. Hypocorisms of English such as *Johnny*, and *Bobbie* were widespread dogs' names in Türkiye, especially names for hounds. These days, however, personal names from different languages are given to pets such as *Donald*, *Julie* from English, *Boris* from Russian, *Belladonna* from Italian, etc. Giving Turkish personal names, though they are still considered offensive by many, is a new tendency, which is similar to the American way of pet-naming (Abel & Kruger 2007) and contrary to Taiwanese practices (Chen 2017). Names thought to be old or obsolete, or at least not given to newborns as commonly as they were in the past are given to pets. Besides, the personal names from TV shows or novels as well as names of celebrities are also among the personal names given to pets. The Turkish names collected in this group are *Bihter*, *Behlül*, *Kayra*, *Rašo* (<Raşit) and *Fatmagül* for fish; *Dilber*, *Banu*, *Aysu* and *Mine* for cows; *Hürrem* for a turtle; *Aliş* (<Ali) and *Cumali* for billy goats; *Ayaz*, *Bihter*, *Behlül*, *Firdevs*, *Süleyman*, *Zeliş*, and *Eyşan* for cats; *Pakize*, *Lina*, *Pakizesu*, *Pekkan*, *Kuzey*, *Ulaş* for dogs; *Süleyman*, *Cafer*, *Alican*, *Hamdi*, *Nazlı*, *Umut*, *Cabbar*, and *Mülayim* for birds; *Haydar* for a spider; *Hüsamettin* and *Haşmet* for rabbits. While some of these personal names are still in use; others are hardly given to newborns and these names can be found in the Turkish classics. *Bihter* and *Behlül* mentioned above are two characters from a classic novel that was recently made into a serial for TV, as well as *Firdevs*, the mother of *Bihter*. Likewise, *Fatmagül* is the name of the leading female character of a Turkish novel which, again, was made TV serial. *Hürrem* is a historical figure, the wife of Süleyman the Magnificent, and she became known more after a TV serial. Likewise, the name *Süleyman* was one of the strongest sultans of the Ottoman Empire and his name has been more and more famous after the TV serial as well. Therefore; *Hürrem & Süleyman*, and *Bihter & Behlül* have been two of the most common personal names given to pet couples. *Mülayim* is a

male name that is not common among newborns and again, it is the name of the leading character in an old comedy film. *Eyşan* was the name of the leading female character in a Turkish TV serial. *Banu* is the name of a Turkish actress and *Pekkan* is the last name of a famous Turkish singer, both of whom have been on stage for over forty years. The foreign personal names given to pets are *Jack*, *Tiffany*, *Alex*, *Romeo*, *Bobo* ‘the name of a footballer’, *Max*, *Şila* (<*Sheila*), *Lucy*, *Alvin*, *Morlin* ‘a name made up of Marilyn/Merlin’, *Şlay* (<*Sheila*), *Lasi* (<*Lassie*), *Mia*, *Oscar*, *Armen*, *Duff*, *Daisy*, *Simbo* (<*Sinbo*), *Frod. Moris*, *Coni* (<*Johnny*).

The physical traits of pets play a crucial part in naming them. However, the modern names differ from the classic, traditional ones as the big, guarding pets have been replaced by small, cute, baby-like pets. The names collected in this group are: *pörtlek* ‘goggly’, *minik* ‘tiny’, *miniş* ‘tiny, miniscule’, *sarı kız* ‘blonde girl’, *karakız* ‘black girl’, *korsan* ‘pirate’, *akkız* ‘white girl’, *alacalı* ‘speckled’, *fındık* ‘hazelnut’, *maviş* ‘blue-eyed’, *gümüş* ‘silver’, *pamuk* ‘cotton’, *kömür* ‘coal’, *kaşmir* ‘cashmere’, *köpük* ‘foam’, *karabaş* ‘black-headed’, *çirkin* ‘ugly’, *saçaklı* ‘fringed’, *duman* ‘smoke’, *beyaz* ‘white’, *bulut* ‘cloud’, *kırpık* ‘shorn’, *tüylü* ‘feathered’, *limon* ‘lemon’, *zeytin* ‘olive’, *karagöz* ‘black-eyed/ also a character in traditional Turkish shadow puppetry’, *kıvalı* ‘hennaed’, *sürmeli* ‘having kohl’, *kıvrık* ‘curly’, *kartopu* ‘snowball’, *bıdık* ‘squat, tubby’, *Kaşmir* ‘cashmere’, *Tarçın* ‘cinnamon’, *Labrador* ‘labrador’, *Golden* ‘golden’, *Akçın* ‘albino’, *Fincan* ‘Turkish coffee cup’, *Paytak* ‘knock-kneed’. As can be seen, the traditional names such as *Kocaman* ‘huge’, *Azman* ‘monstrous’ are hardly seen among modern names.

The last category of the pet names collected for the present study is the “others” as the names in the category are too diverse to categorize. The pet names in this category could be a food name, a famous brand, the profession of the owner, or a name just made up. The names collected in this group are: *Efes* and *Pilsen* (*Efes Pilsen* is a beer brand), *Vosvos* (<*Volkswagen*), *Cacık* (a kind of side plate made from yoghurt and cucumber), *Şehriye* ‘noodle’, *Fıstık* ‘peanut’, *Şirin* ‘smurf’, *Çakıl* ‘pebble’, *Şaşkın* ‘goofy’, *Cigo* (<*Cigara*lık: marijuana), *lokum* ‘Turkish delight’, *Çakal* ‘jackal’, *Yanaşma* ‘roustabout’, *Badem* ‘almond’, *Pati* ‘paw’, *Şuşu* ‘the name of a cartoon character’, *Yiğit* ‘valiant’, *Cesur* ‘brave’, *Belalı* ‘troublesome’, *Raket* ‘racket’, *Soğuk Su* ‘cold water’, *Tiffany*, *Pastel*, *Kraliyet* ‘royalty’, *Rüzgar* ‘wind’, *Kontes* ‘countess’, *Karamel* ‘caramel’, *Lucky*, *Efe* ‘swashbuckler’, *Sivaslı* ‘someone from the city of Sivas’, *Ateş* ‘fire’, *Şımarık* ‘saucebox’, *Haylaz* ‘prankish’, *Dost* ‘friend’, *İbiş* ‘fool’, *Miço* ‘shipboy’, *Kabus* ‘nightmare’, *Oskar* ‘Oscar- Academy Award’, *Kont* ‘Count’, *Tuzik*, *Tekila* ‘tequila’, *Şans* ‘luck’, *Evsun*, *Şeker* ‘Sugar’, *Çağla* ‘unripe almond’, *Asil* ‘noble’, *Paşa* ‘general’, *Okyanus* ‘ocean’, *Çapkın* ‘debauchee’, *Geveze* ‘chatterer’, *Berduş* ‘vagrant’, *Çene* ‘jaw’, *Göz* ‘eye’, *Şanslı* ‘lucky’, and *Milka* ‘a chocolate brand’, *Dişçi* ‘dentist’, *Kaju* ‘cashew’, *Mambıl* ‘mumble’.

Conclusion

During last few decades, the way of life has changed in Türkiye as in the whole world. The very change in the way of life has led to a diversity in terms of the species of pets owned. People adopted new species such as rodents and reptiles as pets. While traditional pets like dogs and cats have remained as common pets, most of the traditional big dogs have been replaced by small ones as the protection duty has diminished and they have turned into friends rather than protectors. The most dramatic change in the pets has, probably, been the names given to them. The pet-naming practices have changed to an extent that even the categorization of the names is quite difficult. As a result of advances in communication technologies people have been able to interact with each other although they are physically so remote. Besides, a number of different online streaming platforms as well as social media, the use of which doubled or tripled, especially during the pandemic, have led to an increase in the number of pets owned, diversity in species, and the names given to them in Türkiye.

The results of this study could be compared and contrasted with similar studies conducted in other countries to see whether the modern pet names are peculiar to Türkiye or whether there is a general tendency for new and unique pet names. In addition, similar research could be carried out in the future to find out the similarities and differences between the present and the future.

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