ETYMOLOGY OF ENGLISH ANTHROPONYMS

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Abstract:
Anthroponyms, or personal names play a significant role in understanding the history, culture, and identity of the nation which allows us to be better aware of the relationships between languages and cultural identifications. English antroponyms have experienced various linguistic transformations, including Old English, Norman, Latin, and Germanic origins. This study aims to provide general information about the etymology of English names considering diverse influences of semantic changes, their sources, and historical events which have an impact on naming traditions. The analysis focus on how names carry historical and cultural values defining individual and societal identities.

Keywords: Anthroponyms, etymology, Old English, Norman conquest, Latin influence, cultural identity, linguistics, semantic changes, onomastics.

Introduction

Anthroponyms are an essential part of human identity and culture. They often carry traces of historical and cultural events, determining linguistic transformations. Names are not merely label which we use to identify individuals, they are reflections of traditions, beliefs, and values of a community. English anthroponyms have evolved through multiple linguistic sources over centuries. Early English names mainly came from Germanic, but the Norman Conquest, Latin influence, and modern globalization have contributed to their diversification. This article explore the distinct etymological origins and linguistic characterizations of personal names in English language. Understanding the origins of English anthroponyms provides valuable insight into the nation's linguistic heritage and cultural diversity.

English names show greater lexical borrowing from Germanic, Latin, and biblical sources, demonstrating their historical and cultural interactions. If we examine the history and etymology of English personal names, we can see a wide range of anthroponyms come from different languages. The roots of English anthroponyms are diverse, reflecting the linguistic legacy of Anglo-Saxon, Latin, French and Germanic influences.

The analysis of the origins of English anthroponyms can be categorized according to various linguistic impacts:[2;12]

1.   Old English Names

Old English (Anglo-Saxon) names were primarily derived from Germanic roots, consisting of compound words with specific meanings.

Examples:

- Edward –from Eadweard ("wealthy guardian").
- Harold –from Hereweald ("army ruler").
- Oswald –from Osweald ("divine power").

2.   Norman Influence

After the Norman conquest, many Anglo-Saxon names declined, while French and Latin-based names became dominant. These names often had roots in Roman or Germanic traditions.

Examples:

- William – from Old Norman Willahelm ("resolute protector").
- Henry – from Old High German Heimirich ("home ruler").
- Robert – from Hrodberht ("bright fame").
- Richard – from Ricohard ("brave ruler").[3;9]

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3. Biblical and Christian Names

With the spread of Christianity, biblical names from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin sources became popular.

Examples:

- John – from Hebrew Yochanan ("God is gracious").
- James – from Hebrew Ya'aqov ("supplanter").
- Elizabeth – from Hebrew Elisheva ("God is my oath").
- Michael – from Hebrew Mikha'el ("Who is like God?").

During the Middle Ages, The adoption of biblical names further enriched the English anthroponymic repertoire, infusing it with religious significance and cultural resonance.[6;14]

4.Modern Influences

In contemporary English, naming traditions has been influenced by multiple factors, including literature, globalization, and cultural diversity.

For Example, names like Jessica (from Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice) and Wendy (from Peter Pan) were created by authors. Shortened forms of names ,such as , Jake (from Jacob) and Liz (from Elizabeth) are common to adopt today.[5;45]

Naming trends in English-speaking countries have evolved, influenced by social, cultural, and linguistic factors. While traditional names endure, new trends emerge, such as the revival of vintage names, the adoption of unique spellings, and the influence of popular culture. In Anglosphere, naming practices have evolved in response to historical events, religious beliefs, and norms of society. Modern parents may choose names that reflect cultural heritage while embracing contemporary trends and global influences.

Personal names in English-speaking cultures often carry familial, religious, or historical significance. Surnames may reveal ancestral occupations, geographical origins, or lineage, providing insights into familial heritage and social status. Names in English culture convey profound meanings and symbolism, reflecting religious beliefs, cultural customs, and societal values. There is a variety of naming ceremonies for newborns, highlighting the importance of names as markers of identity and belonging.[1;4]

Inspite of their linguistic and cultural differences, English naming traditions often share commonalities and cross-cultural influences. Historical migrations, trade routes, and geopolitical shifts have facilitated the exchange of names and naming practices and transformations, enriching the anthroponymic repertoire of linguistic community.

Conclusion

The study of English anthroponyms provides valuable insights into the etymological origins and cultural significance of language and identity. The etymology of English anthroponyms reflects a rich blend of history, language, and culture. From Anglo-Saxon and Germanic roots to Norman, biblical, and modern influences, English names continue to evolve, adapting to changing social and cultural trends. As name formations continue to evolve, there is always need to explore the linguistic and cultural transformations of anthroponyms and it remains as a key subject of many researchers.

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