Naming Patterns for Felines at Budapest Zoo
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Abstract

Animal names represent an unfairly neglected area of research in onomastics. This work attempts to contribute to the few studies on the subject. The author investigates feline names at Budapest Zoo, based on a corpus of nearly 200 names. The topics covered include various naming patterns, their motivations, and such departures from the norm as animals with multiple names and names based on mistaken gender attribution. The material is organized into groups by several criteria including motivational basis, linguistic origin, word classes and semantic aspects. The study may open up paths for further research both in Hungary and internationally.

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1. Introduction

As is widely known, the study of animal names has been a grossly neglected area of research in onomastics. Most treatments of the subject are only concerned with the naming of pets, which is easily explained by the fact that the act of naming presupposes a strong 'personal' relationship between animals and humans. This is naturally the case with pets and livestock animals which are in daily contact with their owners. Wild animals, by contrast, are not named by default, except when they are artificially confined to living in the proximity of people, in zoos or safari parks.

The present paper reports on original research on feline names at Budapest Zoo. The topics to be covered include the background and sources of my research, the motivation of the names, and their classification in terms of source language, proper noun or common word origin, parts of speech and semantic categories. Finally, special mention will be made of animals with multiple names and of the gender mistakes occasionally made by their name-givers.

2. The background and sources of the research

Looking for reasons behind the neglect of animal names, we should first recall that these names do not usually have the same significance for cultural history as personal and geographical names do (Laczkó 2003: 224-225). Hence, it is only natural that the latter two areas have attracted much more scholarly attention. Secondly, the study of animal names is also hindered by the scarce availability of historical records, especially compared to the two name types mentioned above (T. Somogyi 2003, J. Soltész 1970, 1981, 1986, Hajdú 1989) Despite the small number of publications in the area, a recurring theme has been the need for an integrated methodology of collecting and classifying animal names, this being an important pre-requisite for systematic comparative research in the future. In Hungary, only three MA theses have been devoted to the name-giving traditions of zoos, one by the author of this paper (Lovas 1993, Lengyel 2005, Sztrákos 2007).

Data collection was greatly facilitated by a computerized database known as ARKS (Animal Records Keeping System), which is regularly updated by the attendants and includes data on almost every animal of the zoo in chronological order from the earliest (late 19th century) records to the present. This was supplemented by the study of hand-written catalogues from the preceding period. As was to be expected, not all animals in the list had a name; still, I managed to collect around 200 feline names in total. The background of these names was then investigated by interviews with zoo personnel; however, apart from notable

exceptions, even the attendants had difficulty remembering the motivating factors behind the names.

3. Motivating factors

Generally speaking, three naming conventions play a crucial role at Budapest Zoo:

1. The name evokes an external or internal property of the animal, cf. *Bunkó* 'Naughty' (Siberian tiger), *Kormos* 'Sooty' (black panther) and *Haragos* 'Angry' (black panther).
2. The offspring's name begins with the same letter/phoneme as the name of the mother. I have found no example for this among felines, but here is one with hippopotami: *Lulu*'s offspring is called *Layla*.
3. The name indicates the animal's place of origin, i.e. it either comes from a place name or otherwise evokes the (indigenous) linguistic and cultural traditions of a region, cf. *Szimba* for naming a lion (<Swahili *simba* 'lion'). There is also a clear tendency for giving exotic names to animals from distant parts of the world.

There are of course numerous cases not conforming to any of these conventions, for example when a naming contest lets the public decide on the name. According to the records, felines have not been involved in any of these contests, only other types of mammals: for example, one gorilla was named Gorka by popular vote (via blending from gorilla and Dorka '[diminutive form of the girls' name Dóra]'). Another contest saw Dango emerging as the winner, again a result of blending from Danone (the company which had bought the animal) and gorilla. The name of the giraffe Elmolo, an offspring of Ethosa, was selected by random draw from over 2500 suggestions submitted by visitors. More recently, the Zoo publicized five possible names for a rhinoceros cub born to Lulu, and it was up to visitors to vote for the best. The candidates were Layla 'born in the evening', Lina 'tender', Liwaza 'comfort', Liziuzayani 'young' and Lyabo 'the one who returned'.

In the early 1970's, an initiative was launched to have animals born in the same year named with the same initial letter. As a result, animals born in 1970, 1971, and 1972 had names beginning with A, B, and C, respectively. However, at this point the trend came to a halt, and there was no alternative system to replace it.

As a general rule, animals with Hungarian names tend to be those born on Hungarian soil, while foreign names typically indicate that the animal was named in a foreign zoo and subsequently transported to Budapest. Geographical distance is thus one reason why motivating factors are difficult to trace, with temporal distance raising further obstacles as the corpus data span nearly 140 years. But studying the names of animals currently living at Budapest Zoo is not without challenges either. One problem is that the name-giving attendant may no longer work for the zoo, as there is a high number of young employees with only a few years' experience. Still, the conventions mentioned above and the specific information gained from zoo personnel usually provide some clue to the presumable motives behind the names.

My research on motivating factors primarily relies on information from attendants; secondarily, the names themselves often evoke the background of the act of naming, especially with names indicating internal or external properties of the animal. A lion called *Bömbi* 'Howly' (from the Hungarian verb *bömböl* 'howl' and the *-i* suffix characteristic of nicknames) was named by the attendant's daughter as it was constantly howling. A Siberian tiger, *Mr. Lloyd Jr.*, a.k.a. *Norbi*, received its first name after its father (*Mr. Lloyd*), whereas the second name was due to its slender shape reminiscent of Norbi Schobert, a Hungarian fitness guru. The female called *Nadja* was brought in from Hannover with this name; in her case, no other background information is available.

4. The language of origin

With respect to names of a foreign origin, it should to be mentioned that they are typically transmitted in the oral medium; hence, their written forms do not necessarily reflect the 'correct' orthography. However, this is the way they are preserved as linguistic data, and therefore I do not change their spelling.

There may be several circumstances under which a foreign name is adopted:
1. the animal has been transported to Budapest Zoo from another zoo abroad,
2. the name indicates the animal's place of origin,
3. the name follows a name-giving fashion.

A) *Europe*. Animals from foreign zoos mostly come from English-speaking countries, which is one reason why English names are so popular. Another is the influence of name-giving fashions. These two factors account for the lion names *Ben*, *Bobby*, *King*, *Lucy*, and *Tom*, and the puma names *Cooper*, *Jossy*, *Lady*, *Mixy* and *Tiny*. Further important ties of the institution include those with Czech, Polish, and Russian zoos; hence the adoption of such names as *Csorny* [*Chorny*] and *Csorny II* (for black panthers) as well as *Nadja* and *Szása* [*Sasha*] for Siberian tigers, where the linguistic origin of the name is suggestive of the origin of the species. Other names of a European background either point to the sending zoo's location, or they are inspired by television series, films, or literary works, cf. *Mauzi* (lion, German), *René* (lion, French), and *Carmen* (black panther, Spanish).

B) *Asia*. Far Eastern names are given especially to big cats, mostly with a view to reflecting their natural habitat and place of origin, cf. *Chiang* (leopard), *Liu* (black panther), and *Phenjan* (leopard). In addition, as the leopard name *Mao* suggests, predators are frequently named after dictators and military rulers.

The most numerous group consists of feline names with a Middle Eastern background, where lion names constitute the majority. The most frequent name in this category is *Szultán*, which occurs five times in the corpus. Other names of dignitaries are also highly represented for naming the king of animals, cf. *Basa* [*Bashaw*], *Kalifa*, and *Pasa* [*Pasha*]. Further examples include *Ahmed* (lion), *Almira* (black panther), *Musztafa* (lion), and *Sahib* (Bengali tiger).

C) *Africa*. In a previous section I already remarked on the importance of indigenous languages, providing the background for such names as *Szimba* (Swahili *simba* 'lion'). Here the language of origin for the name evokes the animal's place of origin; in the case of Swahili, East Africa.

5. Animal names from other types of proper name

Animals are often named after well-known people, animals, or places. Accordingly, I have set up a category for names originating from personal names (including those of fictitious characters from literary works, films, or operas, and those of Biblical, historical, or mythological heroes) and another for names coming from place names, which represent a small minority in the corpus. All this suggests that the student of animal names must be mindful of name transfer phenomena, also known as proper name metonymy. In addition, the role of linguistic playfulness and creativity (the use of puns) must be recognized.

A) Within the class of personal names (as a source of animal names), *the names of literary characters* have the largest share, with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* contributing two names, *Romeo* and *Júlia* (both lions). Tales and novels are also popular sources of

inspiration, as the name *Bagira* (for a black panther) suggests. Hungarian literature is represented, for example, by the name *Csui* for a black panther (from Zsigmond Széchenyi's documentary novel of the same title), but foreign authors have also left an enormous impact, cf. *Bagira* (from *The Jungle Book* by R. Kipling) and *Sheherezad* (from *One Thousand and One Nights*). In the corpus, names taken over from f i l m s are always those of the protagonists, highlighting the prominent status of the name's new bearer in the world of animals, cf. the lions named *Tarzan*, *Zorro*, and *Szimba* (where the direct motivating factor is not the Swahili meaning mentioned above but rather the animated film *The Lion King*). O p e r a s contribute with *Cso-cso-szán* [*Cho-cho-san*] (Puccini) and two instances of *Carmen* (Bizet), all three the names of black panthers.

Among names of a Biblical origin, *Lucifer* may indicate either the black panther's behaviour or its dark colour, whereas *Salome* suggests ruthlessness. Mythological figures are represented by *Achilles* (lion), *Didó* (leopard), *Orpheus* (lion) and the all-time favourite *Hercules* (always given to lions), with the goddesses *Luna* (Siberian tiger) and *Siva* (lion) also appearing on the list. Historical names include, for instance, those related to Antiquity, and here again the names of dictators and military rulers are popular choices in the naming of big cats, cf. *Caesar* (black panther, Bengali tiger), *Mao* (two leopards) and *Nero* (lion).

B) *The transfer of geographical names* typically indicates the animal's place of origin or natural habitat. Despite its strong rationale, this convention is rarely adopted; the examples include *Bengál* (Bengali tiger), *Laosz* (Indochinese leopard) and *Zambia* (lion).

6. Animal names from common words, grouped into word classes and semantic categories

Compared to proper names, common words account for significantly fewer animal names in the corpus. Still, they are amenable to classification. In terms of parts of speech, I have grouped them into nominal, adjectival and participial classes.

A) *Nouns*. As the corpus is highly varied, I have established subclasses to make the list more manageable.

a. LIVING BEINGS. Favourite among names associated with humans are the names of dignitaries, especially *Szultán* (occurring five times), followed by *Pasa* (three occurrences), with e.g. *Basa* (lion) and *Sejk* [*Sheik*] (Bengali tiger) also to be found. The names *Cigány* 'gypsy' and *Négus* (from *néger* 'black person') are based on the perceived similarity between dark skin colour and the animal's fur. Names derived from common nouns denoting a n i m a l s are of special interest, as they apply the name of a different species to felines, cf. *Bogár* ('beetle', black panther), *Maki* ('monkey', lion) and *Pondró* ('grub', leopard). These names are most probably based on some external or internal property of the animal.

b. OBJECTS/ABSTRACT NOTIONS. Some common noun sources cannot be assigned to any of the groups mentioned above. These include the sources for *Dúc* ('prop', black panther), *Bálvány* ('idol', lion), the ones evoking natural objects like *Bolygó* ('planet', Siberian tiger), and those related to games such as *Csocsó* ('table football', black panther).

B) *Adjectives*. Apart from nouns, another sizable group is that of adjectives pointing to an external or internal property of the animal as a motivating factor for the act of name-giving. In many cases, the separation of nouns and adjectives is problematic, as several adjectives can also be used in a nominal capacity. Names evoking internal properties include *Bunkó* ('naughty', Siberian tiger), *Füttyös* ('whistling', puma) and *Haragos* ('angry', black panther). Those capturing the external properties of felines are invariably associated with colour in my corpus, as *Barna* ('brown', lion) and *Kormos* ('sooty', black panther) illustrate.

C) *Participles*. Of the three types of Hungarian participles (called progressive, perfect, and 'instant' [cf. the corresponding Latin terminology] in reference grammars), only the progressive features in the corpus, cf. *Morgó* ('growling', black panther).

7. Departures from the norm

A) *Animals with multiple names*. It happens occasionally that an animal imported from abroad and already bearing a name receives a new name from the attendants at Budapest Zoo. Alternatively, it may occur that the animal has several attendants over the course of its long life, and each calls it by a separate name, cf. the story of *Mr. Lloyd Jr. ~ Norbi* (Siberian tiger).

B) *Gender mistakes*. A smile-provoking aspect of animal names is the phenomenon of gender mistakes, as exemplified by a male lion named *Tünde* (a Hungarian girls' name derived by back formation from *tündér* 'fairy' by the 19th century poet Mihály Vörösmarty). Normally the background to such cases is merely a lack of attention: the attendants fail to ascertain the gender of the animal before giving it a name, and subsequently leave the matter at that.

8. Concluding remarks

In this paper I hope to have raised interest in a rather neglected area of onomastics, the study of animal names. My findings about name-giving patterns at Budapest Zoo may serve as a basis for further research by the expansion of the corpus and open up paths for comparative studies both in Hungary and internationally. In addition, the study of animal names may play an important role in our own self-discovery, as in the final analysis, name-giving tells the most about us humans.

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219