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LEXEMES INTO NAMES

Brenna E. Lorenz

Nominization (a term proposed by W. H. F. Nicolaisen in a personal communication, 1988) is a mechanism of name formation that involves the conversion of a lexeme into a name. The opposite is generally called commonization, by which a name is converted into a lexeme. Dr. Nicolaisen has suggested that lexemization would be a more accurate term.

The 931 names examined in this study are English first names that I have found recorded in use in the American colonies and the United States from the 1600s to the present. The list also includes names that have been documented by Dunkling (1977), Crowell (1948), Train (1977) and Puckett (1975). The following types of names were omitted:

- 1) Names such as Petunia or Abstinence, listed in name books without documented usage;
- 2) Common names that are homophonous with English words but were derived from some other source: e.g. Newt from Newton, Bill from William, Candy from Candice;
- 3) Unusual names that superficially appear to be derived through nominization, but probably originated through other mechanisms: e.g. Author from Arthur by dropping *r*; Urine [yu rín] from *Eu-* + (*r*)*ine*; Burial from Beryl; and Sinus and Semen, German and Slavic names, respectively;
- 4) Names formed by nominization in pre-Modern English time; or in dialects unfamiliar to most Americans: e.g. Hengest (Old English), Mavis (British English);
- 5) Names probably derived from surnames rather than directly from lexemes: e.g. Smith, Parker, Walker;
- 6) Nominized foreign words: e.g. Victoria, Gloria, Linda (unless the foreign word is used in English, e.g. Lasagna), and
- 7) Nicknames.

These tests are not necessarily easy to apply in a given situation. For example, a modern use of Doll or Dolly is probably influenced by *doll*, which in turn is derived by lexemization of Doll, Dolly, the diminutives of Dorothy (Partridge 1983). This can be regarded as a case of dellexemization. The use of a name may also be influenced by its similarity to an unrelated English word, as in Kitty, originally from Katherine, but influenced by *kitty*.

The majority (70%) of the 931 names examined are nouns, representing a simple shift from common to proper. Adjectives represent 26%, verbs 4% and adverbs 1%. One exclamation was also found (Rah-Rah). These words underwent a functional shift during nominization. Some words are included in more than one category; Silver, for example, can be used as either a noun or an adjective.

The names have been arbitrarily divided into the following semantic categories: colors, animals, plants, anatomy and physiology, types of persons, personal characteristics, religious terms, inorganic materials, temporal terms, fabrics, objects, food and drink, geological and meteorological terms, localities, numerical terms, mythological figures, and miscellaneous abstract terms. Some names are listed in more than one category, such as Mint in both food and plants. In places, the choice of category is arbitrary, as in placing

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Charity with abstract rather than religious terms, or Dink as a personal characteristic rather than a body part.

The largest category by a narrow margin is personal characteristics, at 18% of the total. Some of these names describe physical characteristics, such as Brawny, Porky, Busty, Chubby, Curley and Shorty. More of them are concerned with personality traits such as Evil, Craven, Amiable, Bossie, Clever, Dense, Energetic, Haughty, Nutty, Remarkable, Shady, Slick, Pensive, Sombre, Snooty, Normal, Odd and Zealous. Others can only be described as circumstantial, such as Wealthy, Freeborn, Alone, Musty, Separate, Barefoot, Choice, Classic, Famous, Favorette, Necessary, and Juicy.

Almost as large, with 17%, is the category of abstract names. Some of these are qualities, such as Constance, Charity, Experience, Defiance and Temperance. Others represent emotions, such as Bliss, Grief, Despair, Fear and Glee. Others are political words such as Dynasty, Anarchy, Chancery, Veto, Court, Counsel, Union and Economy. Many are actions, such as Buzz, Caress, Confer, Dash, Glance, Hop, Make, Murder, Tipple, Lament, Rally, Scrub, Twinkle, Arouse, Putt, and Vote. Many are simply the miscellaneous words that could not be placed in any other category, such as Tango, Limbo, Garble, Atomic, Clue, Forward, Vendetta, Ordeal, Hardship, Loss, Error, Speed, Volley, Radius, Volume, Verb, Vice, Epic, Minus and Oder.

The third largest category, at 16%, are those names denoting types of persons, primarily titular or occupational words. Many pertain to royalty, such as King, Czar, Pharaoh, Queen, Princess, Prince and Duke. Others, such as Admiral, Captain, General, Colonel and Commodore, are military titles. Some denote familial relationships, such as Baby, Brother, Husband, Junior and Sis. Many are occupational, such as Waiter, Crook, Professor, Lawyer, Doctor, Merchant, Harlottè, Vender and Artist. Several others are neither occupational nor titular, but are essentially descriptive or circumstantial. Examples include Beauty, Clone, Boy, Cutie, Dreamer, Bum, Dude, Friend, Hermit, Laddiè, Lassie, Maiden, Lefty, Mate, Loner, Mister, Owner, Savage, Midget, Singleton, Streaker and Sugardaddy.

Seven percent of the names are derived from objects. These include Boots, Calender, Bubble, Carton, Buttons, Casket, Cigar, Crutch, Flake, Mitt, Money, Rope, Treasure, Stamps, Toy, Britches, Gasoline, Pillow and Tack.

Plants contribute six percent of the names. Most are flowers, such as Pansy, Amaryllis, Clover, Dahlia and Tulip. Some are trees: Oak, Mahogany, Alder, Magnolia and Ash. Other names are simply general plant names such as Fern, Thorn, Stump, Mint, Caraway, Branch and Vine.

Animals also contribute six percent of the names. Birds and mammals dominate the animal list, at 41% each. Bird names include Boobee, Canary, Coot, Crane, Dove, Finch, Duck, Meadowlark, Parrot, Quail, and Peewee. Mammals represented include Beaver (a woman's name!), Camel, Fox, Gazelle, Doggie, Kitten, Lamb, Moose, Mutt, Rabbit and Tabby. Six invertebrate names were found: Butterfly, Coral (a coelenterate), Chigger, Cricket, Spider and Tick. Four fish names are Bass, Fishie, Shad and Sturgeon. The only reptile name found was Lizard.

Localities provided another six percent of the names in the study. Many of these commemorate natural landforms such as Cliff, Brook, Ocean, Meadow, Tundra, Mountain and World. Others refer to man-made structures such as Street, Vinyard, Varanda, Hut and Condo. Others, like Star, Moon and Voyd, refer to unearthly settings.

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Inorganic materials, rocks and minerals, taken together, represent 5% of the names. Minerals used as names include Beryl, Clay, Diamond, Ruby and Sapphire. Rocks include Amber, Pebble, Shale, Cinder, Ore and Jet. Inorganic materials include Silver, Steele, and Carborundum.

Religious terms account for four percent of the names. Many of them are titular, such as Priest, Minister, Virgin, Deacon, Elder, Bishop and Pope. Religious objects are represented by Rosary, Temple and Church. Most of the religious names are abstracts such as Acts, Blessing, Chastity, Creed, Immaculate, Deliverance, Purity and Moral.

Food names are almost as abundant as religious names, comprising another four percent of the total. Representative food names that have been bestowed on babies include Bean, Capers, Pickle, Curry, Lasagna, Meat, Pepper, Muffin, Soda, Tequila, Spicey, Spud, Chili, Butter, Lemon, Garlic, Peanut and Treacle.

Miscellaneous geological and meteorological terms contribute three percent of the names. Included in this category are names such as Artesian, Gas, Shell, Earthy and Aurora. Meteorological names are Storm, Cloudless, Dew, Freeze, Icy, Snowy, Sou'wester, Windy, Sunshine and Thermal.

Another three percent of the names are color names, including most of the spectrum: Red, Orange, Green, Blue and Lavender, as well as Brown, Crimson, Grey, Hazel, Ivory, Tawny, Mauve, Golden and Pink.

Two percent of the names pertain to body parts, products or disorders. The list includes Adenoid (a lady from St. Johns, Newfoundland, whose surname is Kidney and whose maiden name was Freake), Brain, Fang, Footsie, Hand, Heart, Organ, Overy, Wishbone, Skin, and Dimple from body parts; Appendicitis, Constipation, Coma, Laryngitis, Meningitis, Peritonitis, Sneezy and Tonsillitis from disorders, and Booger and Phlem from body products.

The remaining categories contain one percent or fewer of the total names examined in the study. The category of temporal terms includes Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer, Midsummer, Season, Morning, Day and Night. Numerical terms, from which Latin names such as Octavius have been excluded, include Fifth, Fortynine, Fourteen, Last, Numerous, Zero and Prime. Fabric names include Cotton, Leather, Nylon, Paisley, Sable, Silke and Lace, but Wool or Satin have not yet been found. Finally, the mythological characters include Brownie, Demon, Fairy, Faun and Muse. Angel, which is also found, has been included with religious names.

Perhaps the most peculiar of all names is Nameless. Nameless Logan was a woman from Arkansas who died at the age of 75, not, as one might have expected, a stillbirth or infant. Her name is an onomastic paradox.

Nominization is a venerable mechanism of name formation that extends back through the recorded history of the English language. Old English Hengest and Horsa were nominized nouns. Old English names more commonly consisted of compounded native etyma, a mechanism that is not used in Modern English. Simple nominization has survived, however, to produce some of the most interesting and entertaining names in Modern English.

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