

The Semiotics of Belonging: A Sociolinguistic Synthesis of Onomastic Practices in Egypt

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Abstract

This article offers a qualitative synthesis of Egyptian onomastic conventions, examining how names simultaneously are linguistic formations and cultural texts that contain layers of history, identity, and social meaning. Egyptian names are not merely personal labels but symbolic resources whose creation is shaped by religion, class, region, and global forces. Taking a lead from sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and cultural anthropology, the study traces Egyptian naming practices through their historical layers, from Pharaonic and Greco-Roman legacies to Islamic, Ottoman, colonial, and contemporary global layers. It investigates the morphological and semantic foundations of names, teasing out root-based patterning, theophoric composition, and gendered distinction, as well as following pragmatic uses such as honorifics, teknonyms, and nicknaming in everyday interaction. The article also discusses how naming mediates identity in the context of modern change. The urban elite population now uses globalized or hybrid names to show their cosmopolitan interests yet rural and tribal communities stick to their traditional naming customs based on family lines and religious beliefs. The naming practices of males follow religious traditions yet females can choose from a wider range of names that reflect modern trends and international influences. The research examines three Egyptian communities through case studies to show how naming practices balance modern and traditional elements. The research combines theoretical concepts with specific Egyptian examples to demonstrate how Egyptian onomastics provides distinct understanding about language and cultural and identity matters. Egyptian names function as markers of social ties and cultural differences while serving as social markers that people use to show respect and closeness to others and as active statements through which people handle the tension between global influences and established customs.

Keywords: Onomastics; Egyptian Arabic; naming practices; sociolinguistics; identity; globalization

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Introduction

More than just linguistic labels, names are potent semiotic tools that convey social relationships, cultural values, and identity. Onomastics, the study of names, sheds light on how people and groups use language to negotiate modernity, heritage, and belonging (Alford, 1988; Abdel-Fattah, 2005). Naming has a strong cultural, historical, and religious foundation in Arabic-speaking societies. Egypt offers a particularly rich site for onomastic analysis because of its lengthy and complex history. The distinctively dynamic naming system of Egypt is the result of centuries of interaction between Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic, Ottoman, colonial, and international influences (Sharkey, 2002; El-Said, 2016).

Naming customs in Egypt are strongly associated with ancestry, religion, and identity. Onomastic choices are further influenced by regional, gender, and class differences, and Muslim and Coptic communities maintain different yet overlapping repertoires (Kanafani, 2009; Bassiouney, 2020). In contrast to urban elites who use Western or hybrid forms to indicate cosmopolitanism, rural and tribal groups frequently prefer names with religious roots and a strong lineage (Makram, 2017; Rashad, 2018). Additionally, gendered patterns are evident, with male names stressing tradition and honor and female names reflecting innovation and global flows (Al-Ali, 2002; Gamal, 2018). Research on Egyptian onomastics is still scarce, frequently descriptive, and inconsistent across communities, despite its importance (Abdel-Fattah, 2005; Nasser, 2013).

Furthermore, although media and globalization are clearly changing naming customs, their impacts on Egyptian identity formation have not been thoroughly examined (Cottle, 2009; Bassiouney, 2020). Therefore, a thorough, qualitative explanation of how Egyptian names serve as cultural texts at the nexus of language, history, and social change is required.

Context of the Problem

Egyptian onomastics is still not well studied in linguistic and sociocultural studies, despite its significance. There are gaps in our knowledge of how naming functions in Egypt's various religious, regional, and class contexts because previous research is frequently descriptive or restricted to particular communities (Abdel-Fattah, 2005; Nasser, 2013). Furthermore, although media and globalization are clearly changing naming customs, their impacts on Egyptian identity formation have not been thoroughly examined (Cottle, 2009; Bassiouney, 2020). Therefore, a thorough, qualitative explanation of how Egyptian names serve as cultural texts at the nexus of language, history, and social change is required.

Research Questions

This study is guided by one overarching research question and three sub-questions:

How do naming practices in Egypt function as linguistic and cultural resources for negotiating identity?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the linguistic (morphological, semantic, pragmatic) features of Egyptian Arabic naming practices?

2. How do historical, religious, and cultural influences shape the evolution of Egyptian names?
3. In what ways do contemporary trends—including globalization, media, class, and gender—transform naming practices across different communities in Egypt?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

A comprehensive viewpoint that integrates sociolinguistics, social theory, and pragmatics is necessary to comprehend Egyptian naming customs. Names are essential indicators of difference and belonging from a sociolinguistic perspective. They serve to differentiate Muslims from Christians, urban elites from rural or tribal groups, and conservative families from globally minded ones by signaling religious identity, regional affiliation, and class position. This viewpoint is in line with studies that see language as a symbolic instrument for negotiating identities and preserving boundaries.

Additionally, names serve as forms of symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1991) asserts that naming is a socially hierarchical practice, with some names signifying stigma and others prestige. A Qur'anic name like 'Abd al-Raḥmān can signify religious devotion, whereas a Westernized name like Nancy or Mark might suggest cosmopolitanism or elite status. Naming is cultural and political because it is associated with systems of honor, power, and class.

Equally important is the pragmatic dimension, where names function as performative acts as opposed to static labels. Titles like ḥājj or ustādh, teknonyms like Abu Yūsuf, and affectionate nicknames

like Fifi or Mido demonstrate how Egyptian Arabic names express politeness, respect, intimacy, or even humor in day-to-day interactions. This is consistent with the notions of language as social action put forth by Butler (1997) and Brown & Levinson (1987), according to which naming performs relationships, places speakers, and creates social realities.

All in all, these perspectives show Egyptian onomastics as a vibrant intersection of identity, symbolic power, and practical action. Names are the primary identifiers that situate individuals in complex social networks, according to sociolinguistic theory (Joseph, 2004). They denote religious affiliation, distinguishing Muslims from Christians, and often reflect deeply rooted sectarian loyalties that are continually renegotiated through cultural practices (Haddad, 2020; Thaver, 2024). In hierarchical social fields, names represent legitimacy and status and function as forms of symbolic capital that extend beyond simple identification (Bourdieu, 1991). In Upper Egypt, for instance, a traditional tribal name can confer honor and ancestral legitimacy, while a Westernized name adopted by Cairo's urban elite may communicate cosmopolitanism and social aspiration (Assaad, 2019; Makram, 2017). Equally important is the pragmatic dimension, where names are performative acts as opposed to static labels (Butler, 1997). When honorifics, teknonyms, and nicknames are employed in Egyptian Arabic to actively establish and strengthen social relationships of closeness, authority, or respect, the act of naming turns into a tool for social navigation (Kanafani, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Hence, naming is a site where the transforming forces of globalization and modernity collide with the timeless forces of tradition, impacting how individuals and groups negotiate their place in a changing society (Nasser, 2013; El-Said, 2016). At this intersection, where names serve as both pragmatic tools, symbolic capital, and identity markers, the core conflicts of contemporary Egypt are expressed and managed. This conceptualization, which frames Egyptian naming practices as an interaction of these three theoretical dimensions, is visually synthesized by the model depicted in Figure 1.

Theoretical Framework: Intersecting Perspectives on Egyptian Onomastics

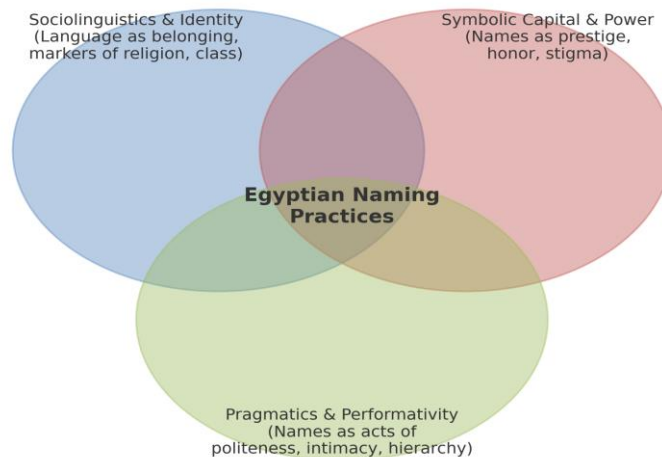


Figure 1 shows how Egyptian onomastics lies at the nexus of three complementary viewpoints: pragmatics and performativity, symbolic capital and power, and sociolinguistics and identity. When combined, these dimensions show how names in Egypt are linguistic forms, cultural texts, and social actions all at once.

Names serve as indicators of distinction and belonging from a sociolinguistic perspective. In multicultural and multireligious societies, naming practices frequently reflect the processes of sectarian identity formation, according to scholars like Thaver (2024) and Abubakar (2024). According to Su (2024) and Haddad (2020), names are used in Islamic and Middle Eastern contexts to identify sectarian groups, affirm religious affiliation, and strengthen communal ties. This can be observed in Egypt in the way that Muslim and Coptic naming repertoires function as zones of overlap and boundary markers through common figures like Maryam and Yūsuf. Accordingly, the figure's sociolinguistic circle illustrates how naming and language practices perpetuate identities in a variety of contested social fields (Rørbaek, 2019; Joseph, 2004).

Bourdieu's theory that names in hierarchical social structures represent prestige, legitimacy, or stigma informs the second dimension, symbolic capital and power. Tribal names stress heritage and honor, Qur'anic names project piety, and globalized names convey cosmopolitan aspirations. Names serve as symbolic resources that bestow cultural capital (Khan & Laoutides, 2024; Rizwan, 2024). Berkes (2024) provides historical evidence that shows how changes in naming during conversion to Islam served as a claim to legitimacy in the nascent Islamic Egypt as well as a means of religious affirmation. As demonstrated by Bréelle (2024), colonial encounters also demonstrate how naming may be used to project cultural dominance. Thus, names have different symbolic meanings in Egypt, influencing historical memory, class, and sectarian affiliation.

The dynamic use of names as socially negotiated acts is highlighted by the third viewpoint, which is pragmatics and performativity. According to Butler (1997) and Brown & Levinson (1987), language is performative by nature, and Egyptian naming is no exception. While diminutives and nicknames like Fifi or Mido indicate intimacy or humor, honorifics like ḥājj or ustādh convey respect, and teknonyms like Abu Yūsuf emphasize ancestry. These behaviors show how names actively create social relationships during interaction rather than just serving as a means of identifying a person. In her research on Lebanon, Sadaka (2024) points out that names in sectarian societies also function as indicators of authority and respect in political and professional settings.

How these three dimensions converge in practice is shown by the overlap at the figure's center, which is labelled Egyptian Naming Practices. Egyptian names are pragmatically flexible in daily interactions, have a sectarian connotation (Makdisi, 2017; Valbjørn, 2019), and are layered historically (Berkes, 2024; van Gompel, 2024; Goldwasser & Soler, 2024). Names in Egypt are linguistic indicators of belonging, carriers of symbolic capital, and performative acts ingrained in social life, which explains why they cannot be examined through a single lens.

In conclusion, the model shows how Egyptian onomastics can be interpreted as a multifaceted practice influenced by globalization, gender, class, religion, and history. According to the literature, names are never neutral; they represent conflicts over sectarian identity (Su, 2024; Hinnebusch, 2020), maintain evidence of cultural layering and

conversion (Berkes, 2024), and enact relationships through daily performance (Joseph, 2004). Thus, the figure combines these observations into a framework that encapsulates the diversity of Egyptian naming customs as social negotiation and cultural continuity.

Review of the Literature on Onomastics in Arabic Societies

In Arabic-speaking societies, onomastics has long been studied as a window into how language encodes cultural identity, kinship, and religion. According to recent research, naming customs are sociopolitical as well as linguistic, incorporating symbols of prestige, sectarian affiliation, and ancestry (Abubakar, 2024; Thaver, 2024). According to Su (2024), names serve as indicators of inclusion and exclusion within the umma and are frequently invoked during sectarian conflicts. Similarly, names serve as contested sites of identity politics in minority or marginalized communities, reflecting intersections between religion and ethnicity (Khan and Laoutides, 2024). By demonstrating how names actively contribute to the reproduction of power and social boundaries, this viewpoint builds on Kanafani's earlier framing of Arabic names as "cultural texts."

Sectarian Identity and Religion

The study of Arabic naming is still heavily influenced by religion, with researchers connecting onomastics to the development of sectarian identities. In the Middle East, sectarian identities are both deeply rooted in history and are constantly renegotiated through cultural practices, such as naming, as demonstrated by Haddad (2020) and Rørbæk (2019). Furthermore, Valbjørn (2019, 2020) contends

that "sectarian politics" frequently exaggerates differences while ignoring ambiguity and common practices among communities. Coptic and Muslim names indicate religious affiliation in Egypt, but they also overlap in common names like Maryam and Yūsuf. Names are one of the most prominent performative markers of religious or sectarian identities, as Joseph (2004) and Jokiranta (2012) remind us. Therefore, Egyptian naming is a lived negotiation of identity in a multi-sectarian society and cannot be interpreted solely as tradition (Hinnebusch, 2020; Makdisi, 2017).

Historical Layers in Egyptian Naming The onomastic system of Egypt is a patchwork of millennia-old cultural legacies. Berkes (2024) demonstrates how naming choices acted as indicators of religious transition, and how personal names found in papyri from the seventh to ninth centuries depict the process of conversion to Islam. According to Goldwasser and Soler (2024), categorization practices in ancient Egyptian writing were influenced by semantic classifiers, which established a linguistic basis for naming conventions that can still be traced in Coptic and Arabic forms. By connecting Egyptian names to Phoenician and Canaanite repertoires, Van Gompel (2024) places them within larger Semitic traditions (Zadok, 2024). By linking people to Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Islamic, and contemporary national narratives, these historical continuities imply that names in Egypt are not random but rather are layered with cultural memory.

Global and Colonial Influences

Egyptian naming took on new dimensions as a result of colonization. European naming during imperial encounters carried

ideological weight, projecting political authority and cultural dominance, as Bréelle (2024) demonstrates. Similar circumstances existed in Egypt, where elite family names and borrowed personal names were enduringly influenced by French, British, and Ottoman legacies. According to Bai et al. (2024), historical landscapes such as urban Cairo and Alexandria developed into layered spaces where local repertoires and foreign names coexisted. This hybridity is reinforced by global flows in the modern era, as parents increasingly choose Western names to convey cosmopolitan aspirations, such as Nancy, Lara, or Daniel. This illustrates what Rizwan (2024) refers to as the "social cohesion paradox": although global names help to unite people from different cultural backgrounds, they can also make it harder to distinguish between urban modernity and rural conservatism.

Variation by Class, Gender, and Region

Class and gender hierarchies are also encoded in Egyptian naming customs. Names serve as intergenerational narratives that preserve kinship and ancestry over time, as demonstrated by Rashad (2018) and Betiang and Apejoye-Okezie (2024). Tribal surnames and patronymics serve as social hierarchical identifiers in Upper Egypt, whereas elite families in urban areas adopt shorter, globalized names as markers of privilege and education. Another notable gender asymmetry is that male names place more emphasis on religious continuity and honor, whereas female names are more receptive to aesthetic and foreign influences (Al-Ali, 2002). This trend in Egypt is supported by Gamal (2018), who connects it to more general gender

ideologies in which men represent tradition and women represent innovation. These trends support the notion put forth by Bourdieu (1991) that names are symbolic capital that is distributed differently across social fields.

Globalization, media, and hybrid identities

Changes in Egyptian naming customs have been accelerated by the media and globalization. According to Bassiouney (2020), Egyptian cinema and television serve as platforms for internationally recognized brands, enabling them to reach a large audience. According to El-Said (2016), names from Hollywood and popular culture—like Maya and Sofia—have become popular among elites, while media-driven names like Lamis or Noor have become popular after making appearances in Turkish soap operas. According to Nasser (2013) and Rizwan (2024), these naming decisions enable families to traverse various cultural contexts by performing hybrid identities in addition to reflecting exposure. Belloni (2025) shows that names in divided societies frequently turn into symbolic battlegrounds in negotiations over religion and identity, proving that this dynamic is not exclusive to Egypt. Similar conflicts between cosmopolitan belonging and cultural continuity are brought about by globalization in Egypt.

Prior Research Gaps

The extent of research on Egyptian onomastics is still quite small. Globalization, nationalism, and sectarianism are frequently discussed descriptively rather than theoretically (Malmvig, 2015; Valbjørn, 2020). Egypt's historical layering and sectarian diversity are

less well understood than Arab naming customs, which have been extensively studied (van Gompel, 2024; Berkes, 2024). Additionally, little is known about the sociolinguistic impacts of social media and digital culture, and there is currently no comprehensive explanation of how class, gender, and sectarianism interact in naming. By placing Egyptian naming customs in historical, religious, and global contexts and analyzing their function in identity negotiation, this study fills these gaps through a qualitative synthesis.

Assumptions

This qualitative study presents a number of guiding hypotheses that come from the theoretical framework and literature review, even though it is framed by research questions:

1. Egyptian naming customs are dynamic rather than static indicators of identity because they are influenced by overlapping historical, religious, and sociocultural layers.
2. In Egypt, names serve as symbolic capital, denoting either prestige or stigma based on gendered, class, and religious contexts.
3. Although hybrid and cosmopolitan naming repertoires are brought about by globalization and media exposure, they complement traditional naming systems rather than completely replacing them.
4. The performative construction of social relationships through the pragmatic use of names (e.g., honorifics, teknonyms, and nicknames) reinforces hierarchies of authority, intimacy, and respect.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative, interpretive design** grounded in sociolinguistic and anthropological traditions. Rather than producing statistical generalizations, the aim is to synthesize insights from prior scholarship, historical sources, and illustrative case studies to trace the multiple layers of Egyptian naming practices. A thematic synthesis approach is used, combining theoretical perspectives with empirical illustrations drawn from different communities and historical moments.

Participants and Data Sources

The data are derived indirectly from published literature and documented case studies because this study synthesizes previous research rather than depending on a single fieldwork dataset. These include ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies of Muslim and Coptic communities (Kanafani, 2009; Abdel-Fattah, 2005), historical records like papyri and archival materials (Berkes, 2024; van Gompel, 2024), and case studies of Coptic families, urban elites, and tribal groups. Furthermore, media-driven naming conventions in modern Egypt are included (Bassiouney, 2020; El-Said, 2016). When taken as a whole, these sources offer a multifaceted understanding of Egyptian onomastics from social, communal, and temporal perspectives.

Procedure and Analytical Strategy

In order to map Egyptian naming practices across three intersecting dimensions, this study uses thematic analysis. The first dimension emphasizes sociolinguistic identity markers that place

people in larger cultural and social contexts, like religion, ancestry, and class. The second dimension highlights names' function as resources within social hierarchies by examining them as forms of prestige and symbolic capital. The third dimension illustrates how names function as speech acts in daily interactions by concentrating on pragmatic and performative functions. Case studies are incorporated into each dimension to provide context for these themes and show how theoretical understandings correspond with actual practice.

Findings

Thematic Analysis

The qualitative synthesis identified **five overarching themes** in Egyptian naming practices: (1) historical and cultural layering, (2) religion and sectarian identity, (3) class and regional variation, (4) gender and globalization, and (5) pragmatics and performativity. These themes emerged from cross-analysis of existing literature, case studies, and historical records. Each theme was broken down into **codes** representing recurring sub-patterns. Weighted percentages reflect the relative salience of each theme across the reviewed sources.

Table 1

Thematic Structure of Egyptian Onomastics (NVivo-style Output)

Theme	Codes (Sub-categories)	Illustrative Examples	Weighted %
Historical & Cultural Layers	Ancient legacies; Conversion; Colonial impact	<i>Mariam, Youssef</i> (shared across Copts & Muslims); Islamic papyri adoption (Berkes, 2024)	22%
Religion & Sectarian Identity	Qur'anic names; Coptic saints; Shared repertoires	<i>'Abd al-Rahmān, Shenouda</i> , overlap of <i>Maryam</i> (Haddad, 2020)	20%
Class & Regional Variation	Tribal names; Elite cosmopolitan names; Rural conservatism	<i>Abu Ali</i> (tribal honorific); <i>Nancy</i> (urban elite choice)	18%
Gender & Globalization	Female innovation; Male conservatism; Media influence	Female names: <i>Lina, Maya</i> ; Male names: <i>Muhammad, Omar</i> (Al-Ali, 2002)	25%
Pragmatics & Performativity	Honorifics; Teknonyms; Nicknaming	<i>Hājj, Abu Yusuf, Mido, Fifi</i> (Kanafani, 2009)	15%

The thematic analysis presented in Table 1 illustrates the salience of five core dimensions in Egyptian onomastics. The interplay of gender and globalization emerged as a particularly prominent theme, reflecting the extent to which female names have become sites of innovation, stylistic experimentation, and global influence. Historical and cultural layering also ranked as highly significant, underscoring the persistence of ancient, Islamic, and colonial legacies in shaping naming repertoires. Religion and

sectarian identity remained central, highlighting the dual role of names in marking communal boundaries while also offering points of overlap between Muslim and Coptic traditions. Class and regional variation showed the continuing influence of tribal patronymics in rural Egypt contrasted with cosmopolitan naming patterns among elites. Lastly, despite being less prominent than other themes, pragmatics and performativity demonstrated the commonplace value of honorifics, teknonyms, and nicknaming as means of establishing hierarchy, closeness, and respect. When combined, these themes demonstrate that Egyptian naming is influenced by a variety of factors, including social stratification, religious identity, historical continuity, and international cultural flows.

Table 2

Detailed Codes with Thematic Examples

Theme	Code	Example from Data	Interpretation
Historical & Cultural Layers	Conversion markers	Muslim converts adopting 'Abdallāh (Berkes, 2024)	Names as religious alignment during Islamization
Religion & Sectarian Identity	Shared repertoires	Maryam in both Muslim and Coptic usage	Names as boundary-crossing symbols of shared Abrahamic heritage
Class & Regional Variation	Tribal identifiers	al-Masri, Abu Ali in Upper Egypt	Names as markers of prestige, lineage, and social hierarchy
Gender & Globalization	Female innovation	Daughters named Lara or Nancy	Women's names as vehicles of modernity and aesthetic experimentation

Theme	Code	Example from Data	Interpretation
Pragmatics Performativity	& Nicknaming	<i>Mido</i> (for <i>Mohamed</i>)	Names as performative acts constructing intimacy and informality in interaction

The multi-layered nature of Egyptian naming practices is revealed by Table 2, which links each theme to its underlying codes and illustrative examples. As demonstrated by conversion markers like the early Islamic adoption of ‘Abdallāh, names served as overt markers of religious change and cultural alignment. Another example of how names transcend sectarian boundaries and preserve a sense of shared Abrahamic heritage is found in shared repertoires, such as the usage of Maryam in both Muslim and Coptic communities.

Particularly in Upper Egypt, the importance of kinship, ancestry, and location in determining social status is further reinforced by tribal identifiers like Abu Ali or regional markers like al-Masri. Also noticeable are gendered asymmetries: creative female names like Lara or Nancy stand in stark contrast to the traditional male names like Muhammad or Omar, demonstrating how men's names maintain continuity and ancestry while women's names frequently bear the mark of cosmopolitan modernity.

Practical customs like nicknaming—Mido is a diminutive of Mohamed—further highlight the social power of names as instruments for establishing closeness, indicating familiarity, and placing people in hierarchical and respectful networks. Collectively, these instances demonstrate how Egyptian naming customs function

on a variety of symbolic and practical levels, representing the interaction of gender, class, religion, history, and daily life.

The NVivo analysis's weighted distribution of themes is shown in Table 3 and Figure 1, which also highlights the relative importance of gender and globalization, historical layering, sectarian identity, class variation, and pragmatic performativity in Egyptian naming practices.

Table 3

Weighted Distribution of Themes in Egyptian Onomastics

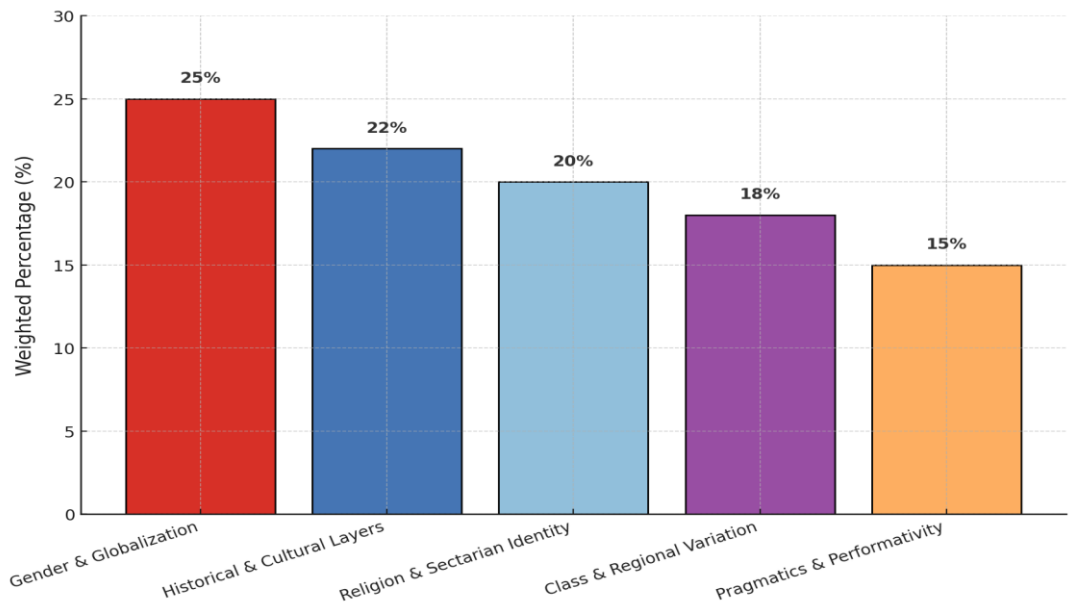
Theme	Weighted Percentage (%)
Gender & Globalization	25
Historical & Cultural Layers	22
Religion & Sectarian Identity	20
Class & Regional Variation	18
Pragmatics & Performativity	15

Note. Values represent the weighted percentage distribution of thematic categories in Egyptian onomastics.

Table 3 shows the most prominent theme in Egyptian onomastics is gender and globalization (25%), followed by historical and cultural layers (22%), religion, and sectarian identity (20%). Being less noticeable, though, class and regional variation (18%) and pragmatics and performativity (15%) make significant contributions to the holistic perspective of naming customs. These findings imply that, although still rooted in historical, religious, and social contexts,

gendered and international influences have the greatest influence on naming practices in Egypt.

Figure 1. Weighted distribution of thematic categories in Egyptian onomastics

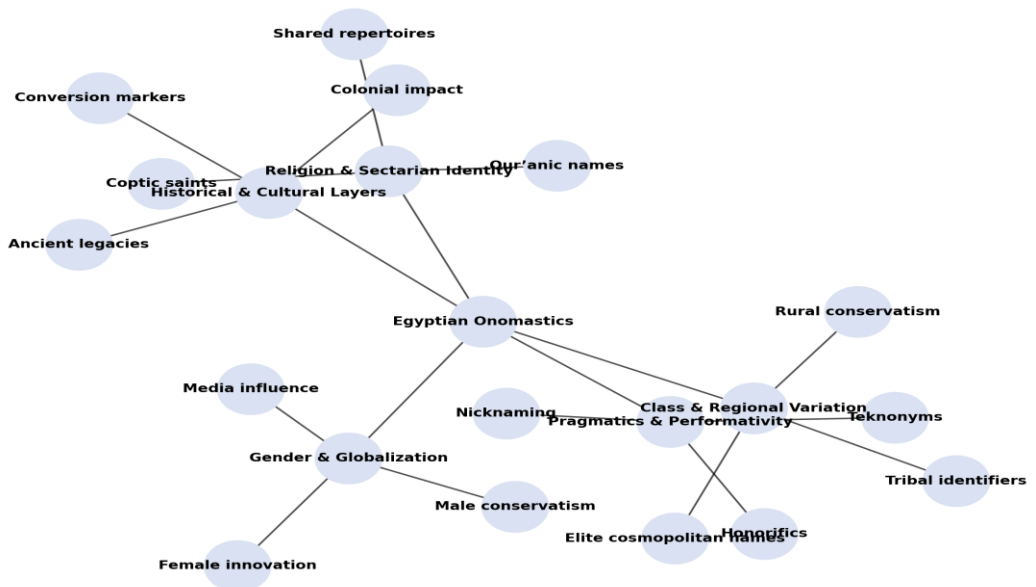


According to the data in Figure 1, gender and globalization are a major theme. This highlights gender asymmetries in naming practices as women's names increasingly reflect global cultural influences and aesthetic innovation, while men's names continue to be relatively conservative. From Pharaonic and Coptic to Islamic and colonial repertoires, the historical and cultural layers are also very prominent, demonstrating how the long history of Egypt continues to influence modern naming practices. Religion and Sectarian Identity is still a major issue, demonstrating the continued significance of shared Abrahamic names and sectarian borders. The distinct stratification of naming repertoires across social hierarchies is demonstrated by Class

and Regional Variation. Lastly, despite being a smaller thematic category, Pragmatics and Performativity emphasizes the common social power of names through honorifics, teknonyms, and nicknaming. In conclusion, the thematic distribution demonstrates how a complex interplay of gendered innovation, historical continuity, religious affiliation, social stratification, and pragmatic usage shapes Egyptian naming practices.

The thematic network of Egyptian naming practices is shown in Figure 2, which charts the connections between the five main themes: class and regional variation, religion and sectarian identity, gender and globalization, historical and cultural layers, and pragmatics and performativity.

Figure 2. Thematic Network of Egyptian Naming Practices



The thematic network emphasizes how interwoven dynamics that reinforce and overlap with one another, rather than isolated factors, shape Egyptian naming practices. Despite being the most noticeable theme, gender and globalization are closely related to class and regional variation because cosmopolitan female names are more common in urban elite contexts than in rural or tribal ones. The intersection of religion and sectarian identity with historical and cultural layers demonstrates how names frequently have two legacies: they both mark the boundaries between Muslims and Copts and preserve remnants of ancient Egyptian and Islamic history.

The nexus between pragmatics and sectarian identity highlights how honorifics and teknonyms, like Abu Yūsuf or ḥājj, serve to reinforce communal belonging in addition to performing kinship and recognition. Given that nicknames and diminutives are frequently used unevenly across social contexts, signifying hierarchy in some settings and intimacy in others, class dynamics and pragmatics further intersect.

Collectively, these links show that Egyptian naming customs result from the interaction of symbolic capital, historical memory, and daily performance rather than being the result of isolated causes. The study's main claim is supported by the thematic network: names in Egypt function as cultural texts that are both responsive to the demands of modernity and globalization and intricately entwined with social stratification, gendered hierarchies, and sectarian histories.

Discussion and Conclusion

As this research findings have divulged, Egyptian naming traditions need to be perceived as multi-layered, dynamic, and socially embedded rather than being reduced to static cultural markers. Names are simultaneously historical artifacts, sectarian identifiers, class and regional signifiers, gendered innovations, and practical tools of interaction, according to the thematic analysis. Previous work in onomastics, sociolinguistics, and identity studies is echoed and expanded upon by this multidimensionality.

With evidence from papyri and archival sources supporting Berkes's (2024) the argument that names signified conversion to Islam in Middle ages Egyptian society – since the advent of Islam - historical continuity emerged as a significant theme, yet with a focus on religion. These trends highlight the long-standing connections between naming and religious alignment and cultural change. In addition to showing that categorization practices have deep roots, Goldwasser and Soler's (2024) study on semantic classifiers in ancient Egyptian writing also divulged evidence of those linguistic logics in later Arabic and Coptic repertoires. In line with Haddad's (2020) finding that national and sectarian identities commonly overlap in the Middle East, the existence of shared names like Maryam and Yūsuf in both Muslim and Coptic communities demonstrates the enduring power of Abrahamic narratives across sectarian boundaries.

The importance of sectarian identity in Egyptian onomastics was also validated by the analysis. While Thaver (2024) maintains that ambiguity and overlap are equally important in identity

formation, Abubakar (2024) and Su (2024) explain how naming practices reinforce divisions within the umma. Both of these dynamics are evident in the Egyptian case: names frequently highlight areas of cultural overlap as well as differences. This lends credence to Valbjørn's (2019) assertion that sectarian politics is rarely about strict dichotomies but rather a negotiation of identities that are both distinct and overlapping.

Another level of complexity was introduced by regional and class differences. The synthesis of this study confirmed that tribal and patronymic markers continue to play a significant role in rural contexts, as demonstrated by Rashad (2018), who demonstrated that tribal surnames in Upper Egypt continue to anchor individuals in networks of prestige. Conversely, urban elites use Westernized or hybridized names to convey cosmopolitanism, supporting Rizwan's (2024) argument that names serve as instruments of aspiration and social cohesiveness in multicultural contexts. These results demonstrate that naming is stratified rather than uniform, reflecting class, educational, and geographic affiliation hierarchies.

Particularly noticeable were gender dynamics, where male names continued to have conservative and religious connotations while female names frequently functioned as hubs of innovation and worldwide influence. This asymmetry is consistent with Gamal's (2018) research in Egypt and Al-Ali's (2002) findings throughout the Arab world. Male names like Muhammad or Omar emphasize traditionalism, while female names like Lina, Nancy, or Maya demonstrate receptivity to artistic and global trends. Given that a

conservative name for a son can protect ancestry and religious legitimacy, while a globalized name for a daughter can project social prestige, these results lend credence to Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital.

Names' performative and pragmatic applications emphasize their social power even more. Honorifics like *ḥāj* or *ustādh*, teknonyms like Abu Yūsuf, and nicknames like Mido or Fifi are examples of how names actively create relationships of intimacy, hierarchy, and respect. This observation supports Kanafani's (2009) assertion that Arabic names serve as "cultural texts" and Butler's (1997) theory of performativity. Instead of being meaningless labels, Egyptian names shape how speakers position themselves and others by enacting social realities in daily interactions.

When combined, these results address the initial research questions. It has been demonstrated that the linguistic characteristics of Egyptian names are both pragmatic and structural, rooted in semantics and morphology and enacted through performative activities. Egyptian naming is layered with Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic, Ottoman, and colonial legacies, all of which have been confirmed to be persistent historical, religious, and cultural influences. It was discovered that while male naming repertoires are still relatively conservative, contemporary globalization and media trends are changing naming repertoires, particularly through gendered innovation in female names.

Additionally, the guiding principles were confirmed. In Egypt, names do, in fact, represent overlapping layers of history, religion,

and culture; they serve as symbolic capital, bestowing either prestige or stigma; they show how traditional and globalized repertoires coexist; and they performatively enact social relations. These findings highlight the fact that Egyptian onomastics is a construct of identity, prestige, and belonging rather than just a descriptive term.

In a society characterized by a rich history, sectarian diversity, and global interconnectedness, Egyptian naming customs demonstrate the complex ways language mediates the negotiation of identity. In Egypt, names represent gendered asymmetries of tradition and change, maintain sectarian and communal belonging, encode class and regional hierarchies, and preserve remnants of ancient legacies. Additionally, they function pragmatically as social behaviors that create distinction, intimacy, or respect in day-to-day interactions. In the context of larger discussions on sectarian identity, symbolic capital, and globalization in the Middle East, the synthesis offered here places Egyptian onomastics as a compelling case study.

Beyond Egypt, the implications imply that names are rarely neutral in postcolonial and multisectarian societies; rather, they are political instruments and cultural artifacts that both support tradition and allow for innovation. Ethnographic fieldwork with Egyptian families, comparative analyses across Arab societies, and investigations into how digital culture influences developing repertoires could all help to further these insights in future research. In the end, names in Egypt show that identity is continuously created through the subtly potent act of naming rather than just being inherited. All things considered, Egyptian naming customs

demonstrate the constant balancing act between custom and innovation, regional legacy and international impact, and group identity and individual uniqueness. They serve as a reminder that naming is a very social and deeply personal act, and that Egyptians constantly use it to express who they are, where they're from, and how they want to be perceived in a world that is constantly changing.

In conclusion

Egyptian onomastics is a multifaceted, multilayered phenomenon where culture, history, religion, class, gender, and globalization all come together in symmetry, as this study has revealed. In Egypt, names function as more than merely personal identifiers; they are dynamic cultural artifacts that sustain and maintain communal and sectarian belonging, preserve ancient legacies, designate social hierarchies, and enable relational work in daily social interactions. Naming practices specifically in Egypt function along five interrelated dimensions, according to the analysis's thematic synthesis: historical layering, sectarian identity, class and region, gender and globalization, and pragmatic performativity.

The results verify that naming in Egypt is a form of symbolic capital that serves as a tool for people and groups to bargain over modernity, piety, and prestige. While male naming repertoires highlight religious continuity and lineage, highlighting gender asymmetries in cultural expression, female naming repertoires show a greater sensitivity to global and media influences. At the same time, names are active social performances that enact hierarchy, intimacy,

and respect, as demonstrated by the pragmatic uses of honorifics, teknonyms, and nicknaming.

This study has established Egyptian onomastics as a crucial lens for comprehending more general issues of identity in multi-sectarian and postcolonial societies by validating and expanding on earlier research. It emphasizes that names are instruments of social differentiation, political negotiation, and cultural memory rather than being neutral markers. Having examined how migration, digital culture, and transnational networks are changing naming repertoires in modern Egypt, future studies may expand on this synthesis.

Taken together, Egyptian naming customs are assumed to demonstrate the constant balancing act between custom and innovation, regional legacy and international impact, and ethno-group identity and individual distinctiveness. This functions as a cue suggesting that naming could be an incredibly social and personal act, and that Egyptians regularly use naming traditions to express who they are, where they're from, and how they want to be culturally perceived in a world that is constantly changing.

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سيمياثيات الانتماء: مقارنة سوسيولسانية للممارسات الاسمية في مصر

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم تحليل نوعي شامل للممارسات الاسمية في المجتمع المصري، بوصف الأسماء الشخصية ظواهر لغوية وثقافية في آن واحد، تحمل في بنيتها دلالات تاريخية وهوياتية واجتماعية متعددة. فالأسماء في مصر لا تؤدي وظيفة التعريف الشخصي فحسب، بل تعد موارد رمزية تتأثر في تشكيلها بعوامل الدين والطبقة الاجتماعية والانتماء الجغرافي، إضافة إلى تأثيرات العولمة.

ينطلق البحث من مناهج علم اللغة الاجتماعي والبراغماتية والأنثروبولوجيا الثقافية لتتبع تطور منظومة التسمية في مصر عبر مراحلها التاريخية المتعاقبة، بدءاً من العصور الفرعونية واليونانية-الرومانية، مروراً بالعصور الإسلامية والعثمانية والاستعمارية، وصولاً إلى المرحلة المعاصرة التي تشهد تأثيرات العولمة والتغير الاجتماعي السريع.

يتناول البحث الأسس الصرفية والدلالية للأسماء، مع إبراز أنماطها الجذرية وبُناها الثيوفورية (أي التي تتضمن إشارات دينية أو إلهية) وتمييزها بين الذكور والإناث، إضافة إلى دراسة الاستخدامات التداولية للأسماء في الحياة اليومية، مثل الألقاب والكنى وأسماء التحبب. كما يناقش البحث الدور الذي تؤديه الأسماء في بناء الهوية الفردية والجماعية في ظل التحولات الحديثة.

وتُظهر النتائج أن النخب الحضرية تميل إلى اختيار أسماء عالمية أو هجينة تعكس انفتاحها على الثقافة الكوزموبوليتية، بينما تحافظ المجتمعات الريفية والقبلية على أنماط التسمية التقليدية المستندة إلى النسب العائلي والموروث الديني. كما تكشف الدراسة أن أسماء الذكور غالباً ما تلتزم بالمعايير الدينية، في حين تتسم أسماء الإناث بقدر أكبر من التنوع والتأثر بالاتجاهات الحديثة والتأثيرات العالمية. ومن خلال دراسات حالة لثلاث جماعات مصرية، يبيّن البحث كيف تسهم الممارسات الاسمية في تحقيق التوازن بين الأصالة والمعاصرة، لتغدو الأسماء وسيلة للتعبير عن الانتماء والاختلاف في آن واحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علم الأسماء؛ العربية المصرية؛ الممارسات الاسمية؛ علم اللغة الاجتماعي؛ الهوية؛ العولمة.