



Pet Naming Practices in Turkey: Cats vs. Dogs

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Abstract

Pet-naming practices reflect the attitudes of pet owners towards their pets and their place in their lives and society. In the US and other western countries, pet animals are often given names that are commonly used for humans. This trend is frequently considered an endorsement of family membership granted to pet animals. In this study, cat and dog names reported by Turkish-speaking cat and dog owners were examined; and the proportion of human vs. non-human, as well as foreign vs. domestic names were investigated. It was observed that cats were more likely to be given human names than dogs. Cats also received more traditional Turkish names, while dogs were more likely to be given foreign or more modern human names. The results are evaluated in relation to the status of pet dogs in the modernization and secularism of modern Turkey. Historically, dogs were granted limited access to homes because of their ritually impure status in Islam. With the modernization and westernization trends, however, having a dog as a pet became a symbol of modernity. The differential pet-naming trends reported in the present study complement such observations regarding the status of cats vs. dogs in modern Turkey.

Keywords: zoonym, anthroponym, first name, proper name, pet-naming practices, Turkish

Introduction

A Tendency Towards Humanization: Pet Naming Practices in the US and Europe

Humans have always had close contact with non-human animals in both rural and urban areas. They not only kept non-human animals as potential food sources, but also used them for protection, labor, and transportation. Some were also kept for pleasure, company, and/or status. Such domesticated animals either shared the family home environment with their owners or were kept close by but outside. Thomas (1983) states that pet animals have three features not shared with other non-human animals. Pets are often admitted to the human household while other animals are left outside; they are not eaten although they are often edible; and they are commonly given personal names. Keeping domesticated animals as pets or companions has become commonplace in many cultures around the world for many hundreds of years (Walker-Meikle 2012), but culture and geography played significant roles in the categorization of individual species as pets (Herzog 2011).

With modernization and the lifestyle changes it brought in urbanity, more and more domesticated animals have started sharing the family home environment where they play important roles in their owners' social life, social status, identity expression, as well as emotional well-being (Franklin 1999). Pets are now commonly considered a part of the modern human family and are treated as such in many ways. During the Covid-19 closure, for example, many human families welcomed a great variety of pets into their homes to share their restricted lives. Today, pet animals not only enjoy human company, but also are treated as humans. They are often dressed like humans, brought to attend social events like birthdays with humans, and even have their own hair salons and cosmetics just like humans.

The increasing treatment of pet animals like human family members has yielded new naming trends. It has been observed that in the US and many other western countries pets are given names that were once reserved for humans (Safire 1985; Brandes 2012). Safire (1985) observed that US Americans tended to give their dogs the names they had left over for the children they never had; alternatively, they named them after favorite relatives, cartoon characters, or rock stars. In that way, pet owners project their dreams and emotions onto the non-human animals in their lives, blurring the traditional boundaries between human and non-human animal naming practices.

Herzog (2018) examined the 100 most frequent dog names in 2015 records in the US and reported that more than 85% of them were traditional human names. In addition, Herzog studied the names given to the pet dogs of US presidents and observed that most dogs in the White House were given human names. After World War II, the dogs of US presidents were more likely to have human names than before the War. This observation was in line with the general trend towards giving human names to pets in the US. A similar tendency in pet naming has also been found in Australia (Abel & Kruger 2007), Germany (Bergien 2016; 2015), Sweden (Leibring 2016), Finland (Saarelma-Paukkala 2015), the United Kingdom (Doherty 2020) and Saudi Arabia (Alqami 2022). At the same time, pet-naming practices vary in significant ways in each of these countries. The fact that these nations have differing ethnic and linguistic profiles may potentially play important roles in these naming variations. Despite these international differences, each of these cited studies docu-

ments the progressive humanization of pet-naming. This trend is especially interesting with regard to canines.

Dogs have a special status among other pets in western countries, most probably because they have a longer history of domestication. As a result, they may enjoy greater humanization through naming more when compared to other pets. Cats follow them closely, though. Abel (2007) observed that dogs and cats were more likely to be given human names than birds and other pets. In this study, it was found that 48% of the dogs (n=200) and 42% of the cats (n=200) had human names. These results contrasted with the lower percentage (20%) of human names given to pet birds (n=137), fish (n=183), reptiles (n=58) and other small pets (n=461). This difference was attributed to the fact that cats and dogs roamed freely among the other family members at home in contrast to birds, fish and other pets that were typically kept in cages or other restricted places. This logic might help to explain why only fourteen percent of the horses (n=187) had human names. Abel (2007) suggested that in comparison to all other animals that were studied, horses were least likely to be given human names, and that this might be due to the fact that horses were most often kept outside of human homes.

Pet Naming Practices Elsewhere

Though common, anthropomorphized pet-naming practices, that is, giving “human” names to pet animals is not necessarily a universal trend. Pets are less likely to have human names in Taiwan (Chen 2017) and Ghana (Yakub 2020), for example. Chen (2017) analyzed cat and dog names (n=321) that were collected from various social media sources and observed that pets were given food names (e.g., *Candy*) or named based on their emotional disposition (e.g., *Rascal*), color (e.g., *Amber*, *Midnight*), and owner’s professional profile (e.g., *Psychic*). It was also common to create entirely new names with word formation strategies such as reduplication, onomatopoeic association, diminutives and other endearment morphology. In Taiwan, the names of dogs and cats do not overlap with the typical human names given to human family members. Chen (2017) concludes that pet names have their own “pet names” category; and in that sense, the pet-naming pattern in Taiwan is similar to the earlier pet-naming trend in western countries, as described by Safire (1985). Before World War II, pets were given names such as *Laddie*, *Trixie*, *Rusty*, which were unlikely to be observed as children’s names in the US (Brandes 2012; Abel & Kruger 2007).

Yakub (2020) studied the pet-naming practices in the Nzema people in Ghana. He reported that the Nzema pet names are mostly proverbial in nature; and are used as an indirect communication tool among the members of the community. An example is *Dwenlekpaε* which means ‘think positively’ (Yakub 2020, 9). Simple, mono-morphemic pet names are also observed in Ghana, but these names refer to abstract notions such as ‘justice’ or ‘patience’ (e.g., *Adom* ‘grace’). According to Yakub (2020), these Ghanese pet names do not coincide with human names. Similarly, Yagafarova (2021) reports that the Bashkirs, a Turkic ethnic group indigenous to Russia, never give their pets the kinds of names that they would give to their children. This finding is apparently in marked contrast to the Bashkirs’ neighbours, the Russians.

Variations in international naming preferences for pets may also be related to religious factors affecting the treatment of pets in different societies and cultures. Alqarni (2022), for example, focused on cats in Saudi Arabia, because dogs are not considered “pets” due to their ritually impure status that restricts their access to homes. Citing various hadith and sayings of the prophet Mohammad, Alqarni reported that in Islam, it is not appropriate to keep dogs at home. Unlike cats, dogs can only be kept as watch dogs kept outside of the home for hygienic reasons. Cats, in contrast, may be kept at home in Islam; and as Alqarni observed, just as in western societies, cats in Saudi Arabi are likely to be given human names. A similar observation on the special status of dogs as opposed to cats was reported in Mattiello et al. (2021) based on interview data collected in Tunisia. Mattiello et al. (2022) observed:

[i]n Tunisia, cats seem to be the favoured pet animals, they are the only animals that have free access to most houses. The keeping of dogs is a relatively new phenomenon in Tunisian society that is disapproved of, especially by the older generation, because of the impure status that dogs have in Islam (137).

Similar findings have been reported from Iran, where keeping pet dogs at home and walking them in public places are not approved of, especially by the conservative members of the community (Hamedani 2022; Etehad & Mostaghim 2019). However, pet dogs are becoming more popular among “a specific slice of Iran’s population—young, urban, educated, frustrated with the Islamic government” (Moaveni 2011).

Cats vs. Dogs in Turkish Society

The Ottomans had sympathy for animals but they did not keep dogs as pets inside their houses, because dogs were considered impure in Islamic tradition (Gündoğdu 2023; Shick 2019; Emiroğlu 2015; Fortuny 2014; Subaşı 2011, among others). Street dogs (and cats) roamed freely on streets and were taken care of by the entire community, civil organizations, and foundations (Shick 2019). In contrast, cats were considered pure or clean and had relatively more access to homes. Adopting dogs as pets and granting them access to homes started during the last century of the Ottoman Empire along with other westernization or modernization practices in the society. Gündoğdu (2023, 28) who contextualizes the pet-keeping practices, especially among the empire's well-to-do classes, argues that alongside the growing global pet-keeping practices, "dogs, who in the early periods were kept for hunting, protection, and companionship, in the modern period were appropriated and imagined as pet animals parallel to the global trend in other parts of the world, especially western Europe. In this new anthropocentric and hierarchical relationship, dogs were anthropomorphized, ascribed gender roles, and admitted to the domestic spaces as household members". Gündoğdu (2023) presents and discusses cases where breed dogs were brought from Europe by the Sultan himself and his family members, as well as by the other people from upper socio-economic classes. During this period, individualization of dogs included giving them names. Pet dogs, then, were seen as symbols of modernization and the western lifestyle, and they were associated with development, civility, progress, and order (Gündoğdu 2023). Pet dogs were mentioned in the diaries and travel logs of the European visitors, and they also appeared in the paintings of the time (Gündoğdu 2023; 2018). They were mentioned as symbols of the western civilization and European lifestyle in the literature of the time and were contrasted with cats who were portrayed as symbols of the eastern and more traditional lives (Gündoğdu 2023; Güler 2020).

Today, in the Republic of Turkey, a secular state established in 1923, more than 90% of the population is registered as Muslims. According to a recent report on religion and faith, about 80% of the population report themselves as "religious" (Nişancı 2023). Turkish people are not very homogeneous about their religious observances though, and may have variable interpretations of the religious obligations. Treatment of dogs as pets and their access to home environments is one of such variable behaviors. While some think that cats are welcome at home and dogs should remain outside, others think that there is no reason why dogs should be different as long as the hygiene of the home environment is maintained. According to the former view, dogs can only be kept for practical purposes, as watch dogs or guards for cattle—they cannot be pets that are kept at home for pleasure (Baysa 2021). In this sense, cats are a part of the family, enjoying the privilege of sharing the home environment, while dogs are only external to the family, yet with important duties outside. Ambaroğlu (2007, 40) reports that 56.11% of the participants (n=154) agree with the statement "Islam does not approve of keeping dogs at home". Pet dogs that roam freely at home are observed in families who adopt a secular life style. Kafalı (2022) studies pet-keeping attitudes in Turkey within the context of pet owners' religiosity and reports that the dog owners have the lowest score of religiosity among the owners of other pets including cats, fish, birds, and others. This result is based on a very small sample size (48 cats and 4 dogs) and needs to be evaluated with caution. However, it is still important to see that it is in line with the observation that keeping dogs as pets at home is observed in families who have a relatively less conservative life style. Therefore, in contemporary Turkish society, dogs can still be seen as symbols of a particular social status and attitude while cats do not seem to have such a symbolic status.

Naming Practices in Turkey

After their conversion to Islam, speakers of Turkish origin increasingly used names with Arabic and Persian origin. These names gained popularity and were used along with Turkish names. During the modernization and westernization trends in the 19th century Ottoman Empire, and through the language reforms after the foundation of the republic of Turkey in 1920s, modern and secular names, mostly of Turkish origin, became popular and were used along with more traditional names (Türköz 2023; Gürpınar 2021). As it is the case in many other societies, naming practices have been influenced by historical and social events such as migration as well as changes in social classes and family structures, global trends, social media and traditional media like the TV (Köse 2014; Çelik 2006, 2007). Despite these factors and secularization trends, religion may play the most significant role in Turkish naming practices. In a recent study of 416 participants, Koçer (2024) reported that 50% of the male names and 27% of the female names in Turkey were traditional religious names: these percentages constitute the biggest proportion of name types in both genders. Names with European or other non-Turkish language origins have always been observed among the non-Muslim minorities and families with non-Turkish members (mostly Greek, Armenian, or Jewish populations), which comprise about 20% of the population (Ender 2016);

Gürpinar 2021). It was further observed that, although these name-holders are citizens of Turkey, they may be perceived as “foreign” by the majority (Ender 2016). Some of the names found in these groups are traditional in these minority populations; and over time, a portion of these names gain popularity among people of Turkish origin who adopt a modern, western or non-religious lifestyle (Çelik 2006, 2007). There are restrictions governing how names in official records may be spelled, however. Names can only be spelled with the characters that are included in the official Turkish alphabet adopted in 1928. The letters Q, X or W, for example, are not allowed and must be replaced by close alternatives available in the Turkish alphabet. For example, *Washington* is officially spelled as *Vaşington*. In Turkish, words are spelled as they are pronounced and each letter represents a phoneme. The names *Sophie* and *Jenny* are spelled *Sofi* or *Ceni* in Turkish records.

Despite all of these interesting aspects of Turkish onomastics, to the author’s knowledge, there has been no study on cat-naming practices in Turkey. Çağlar (2016) studied dog names along with names given to horses, cows, and eagles based on data from epic poems, interviews and social media. According to Çağlar, dogs used to be given names related to their duties as watch dogs in the past. However, today, reflecting their changing role in the Turkish society, they are often given funny or cute names; or they are named after dog characters in the films (e.g., *Haçıko*). This tendency is considered similar to naming human children after important historical figures. Although there have been numerous studies on the place of dogs in human social life, history, and literature from the late Ottoman Empire to modern times, there has not been a systematic study of modern pet-naming practices in Turkey. The current investigation addresses this gap in the literature. The goal of the present study is to examine the pet-naming practices with a particular focus on comparing dog and cat names in Turkey, a country in a location bridging the east and the west, both geographically and culturally. The study, first of all, addresses the general question of whether dogs and cats in Turkey have human names in a way similar to dogs and cats in western countries. Next, we look at whether there is a difference between the proportion of human names given to cats and dogs. Finally, the question of whether dogs and cats have foreign or domestic names is investigated with the purpose of understanding whether dogs are considered more foreign or western than cats as symbols of modernity.

Methodology

Cat and Dog Names Data

The first set of data was collected from the internet page of a popular Turkish pet shop, *Petlebi* (<https://sosyal.petlebi.com/>), where pet owners register their pets. The webpage lists the most popular pet names of the year. Thirty names given to female dogs and thirty names given to male dogs were taken from that list. Similarly, the most popular thirty names for both female and male cats were drawn from the same portal. Human names were taken from the Turkish Statistical Institute where the thirty most frequent names for male and female citizens in the birth registration records can be accessed (<https://nip.tuik.gov.tr/?value=EnCokKullananIsimler>). In addition, this platform provides the list of names that were given to newborns in a particular year. Both lists were downloaded for comparison with the most popular dog and cat names.

The second set of data was taken from an online survey of pet owners’ linguistic attitudes towards their pets. Pet owners were invited to fill out an online questionnaire and provide details about their relationship with their pets along with information about themselves and their pets (Ketrez 2023, 2024). The data set included 171 cat and 76 dog names with duplicates. There were more cat names because there were more cat-owners who agreed to respond to a random call for participation. The numbers are representative as they are correlated with the numbers of officially registered cats and dogs in İstanbul, where there are about three times more cat owners than dog owners (www.istanbul.tarimorman.gov.tr/). Based on the survey results, it was determined that most pets (95% of cats, 96% of dogs) lived in the same apartment or house with their owners and roam freely. Most of the surveyed pet owners (80% of cat owners, 94% of dog owners) considered their pets a member of their family, refer to themselves as parents and address their pets using kinship terms such as “*kızım*” ‘my daughter’ or “*oğlum*” ‘my son’ (72% of cat and dog owners). Thus, cat and dog owners in this study were found to have a similar attitude towards their pets. In other words, the dogs in the study did not have less access to their owners’ homes or more distant relationships with their humans.¹

In the current study, gender information, where available, refers to the sex of the name-holder, not the name. Turkish does not have grammatical gender, and Turkish names do not have lexical or morphological markers that indicate gender. The only exceptions are traditional names with female -(y)E which is a marker of Arabic origin (e.g., male *Hayri* vs. female *Hayriye*). However, this marker is not productive in Modern Turkish and is not observed in modern names or names of Turkish origin.

Coding and Analysis

To answer the question of whether cats and dogs have human names, the pet names in the lists were coded as “human” or “non-human”. The “human names” included domestic names or foreign names that are given to Turkish children (e.g., *Ömer* and *Tommy*). In addition, the “human” category included names of human film characters (e.g., *Leia*), scientists (e.g., *Einstein*), athletes (e.g., *Hagi*) and other celebrities (e.g., *Keisha*). By comparison, the “non-human” names included those names that were attributes referring to the color (e.g., *Sarı* ‘yellow’), the appearance (e.g., *Tıylü* ‘furry’), the character (e.g., *Gamsız* ‘carefree’), the mood (e.g., *Happy*) of the pet. This category also included references to food (e.g., *Muffin*), locations (e.g., *Roma*) or objects (e.g., *Boncuk* ‘bead’). In Turkey, these names would not be given to children. To further determine whether a name could be classified as “human” or not, Nişanyan’s Names Dictionary (NNN) [<https://www.nisanyanadlar.com>] was used as a source. NNN draws its data from the official birth records and includes information regarding the number of registered citizens of Turkey who have that name, the geographical location where the name is mostly recorded, as well as the popularity graphics over the years. The names that are found in NNN were coded as “human” names regardless of their frequency.

The “pet names” were further sub-categorized as “domestic Turkish names” (e.g., *Pamuk* ‘cotton’) and “foreign language names” (e.g., *Happy*). The domestic-foreign distinction is also based on the dictionary inclusion criterion. In addition to NNN, Online Turkish Language Dictionary (<https://sozluk.gov.tr/>) of the Turkish Language Academy was used. If a name was included in either of these dictionaries, it was considered a “domestic name”. This category included proper names that are typically observed in the Christian or Jewish communities in Turkey (e.g., *Sofi*) as well as the new trendy names (e.g., *Mila*) along with the more traditional names. The way the pet owners spelled their pets’ names was also taken into consideration in this categorization. The name *Viski*, for example, was coded as a “domestic name” because it is included in the Turkish dictionary. By comparison, the name *Whiskey* was categorized as being “foreign”. The proportion of human vs. non-human names as well as foreign vs. domestic names were calculated separately for both dogs and cats; and their relative proportions were compared with chi-square tests.

Results

Do Cats and Dogs Have Human Names?

Tables 1a and 1b show the 20 most popular dog and cat names (10 male, 10 female) along with the most popular human names (cumulative) and the most popular names given to newborns in 2022. There are some duplicates in the pet lists because the same name may be observed as a name of both a male and a female pet (e.g., *Duman* ‘smoke’). There are also some overlaps between cat and dog names. For example, *Tarçın* ‘cinnamon’ appears in both pet name lists. When we compare the cat and dog names with the human names, we see that none of the pet names overlap with the human names in the list. In the list with 60 names in each category (that can be seen at OSF platform), as well, there is no overlap at all. So, the present data suggest that, unlike the pet owners in the US and other western countries, Turkish pet owners do not give human names to their pets. However, the answer to the question of whether pets in Turkey can have human names is more complicated than this.

Table 1a: Popular Names of Male Cats, Dogs, and Humans in Turkey in 2022–2023

Order	Sex	Cat Names	Dog Names	Human Names	Newborn Names
1	Male	Duman 'smoke'	Paşa 'pasha'	Mehmet	Alparslan
2	Male	Paşa 'pasha'	Ares	Mustafa	Yusuf
3	Male	Leo	Oscar	Ahmet	Miraç
4	Male	Pamuk 'cotton'	Tarçın 'cinnamon'	Ali	Göktuğ
5	Male	Tarçın 'cinnamon'	Leo	Hüseyin	Ömer Asaf
6	Male	Bulut 'cloud'	Zeus	Hasan	Eymen
7	Male	Badem 'almond'	Pablo	Murat	Ömer
8	Male	Boncuk 'bead'	Alex	Yusuf	Aras
9	Male	Ares	Max	İbrahim	Mustafa
10	Male	Mars	Cesur 'brave'	İsmail	Ali Asaf

Table 1b: Popular Names of Female Cats, Dogs, and Humans in Turkey in 2022–2023

Order	Sex	Cat names	Dog Names	Human Names	Newborn Names
1	Female	Mia	Şila	Fatma	Zeynep
2	Female	Pamuk 'cotton'	Hera	Ayşe	Asel
3	Female	Maya	Maya	Emine	Defne
4	Female	Luna	Mia	Hatice	Zümra
5	Female	Mınnos 'small-dim'	Tarçın 'cinnamon'	Zeynep	Elif
6	Female	Boncuk 'bead'	Pamuk 'cotton'	Elif	Asya
7	Female	Badem 'almond'	Lucy	Meryem	Azra
8	Female	Duman 'smoke'	Bella	Merve	Nehir
9	Female	Şila	Luna	Zehra	Eylül
10	Female	Prenses 'princess'	Daisy	Esra	Ecrin

When we have a closer look at the names in Table 1a and 1b, we see that pet names can be human names in Turkey, although they are not among the most popular human names that are included in the data drawn from the official records. The cat name *Bulut* 'cloud' and the dog name *Cesur* 'brave', for example, are frequent human names. According to NND, there are 25,433 people with the name *Bulut* (<https://www.nisanyanadlar.com/isim/Bulut>) and 10,792 people with the name *Cesur* (<https://www.nisanyanadlar.com/isim/Cesur>) in Turkey. The most popular dog name, *Paşa* 'pasha', is recorded as a human name 10,226 times (<https://www.nisanyanadlar.com/isim/Pa%C5%9Fa>) and the most popular cat name *Duman* 'smoke' is shared by 556 humans (<https://www.nisanyanadlar.com/isim/Duman>). Of course, these numbers are small in comparison to the most popular human names such as *Mehmet* which has more than two million human name-bearers (<https://www.nisanyanadlar.com/isim/Mehmet>). However, it is important to acknowledge that popular pet names can be human names. If we look at the data from this perspective, it would be wrong to conclude that pets in Turkey do not have human names. Pets do share names with humans, but their names are among the least frequent human names.

Human vs. Non-Human Names Revisited

Next, we look at the data drawn from the online survey to compare cat and dog names in terms of their human vs. non-human status determined by the criterion of inclusion in NND. Table 2 shows the numbers and proportions of pet names that also occur in NND (under the column "Human"). These are the numbers of names that a pet owner could give to his or her children in Turkey. Of the cat names, 54.38% can be human names, and of the dog names, 32.89% can be human names. Cats are more likely to have human names than dogs ($\chi^2=9.9772$, $N=247$, $p=.002$). The score shown in the fourth column includes names of foreign celebrities, film characters, foreign politicians or historical figures that are human but are not recorded in NND (e.g., *Darwin*, *Einstein*). When such names were included, the proportion of human names increased in both groups: 60.81% of cat names and 45.05% of dog names can be categorized as human. However, the difference between the groups is maintained. Cats are still more likely to have human names, although the difference between dogs and cats decreased with the inclusion of foreign human names ($\chi^2=4.66$, $N=247$, $p=.031$).

Table 2: Human vs. Non-Human Names

	Human	Non-Human	%	Human including Foreign	%
Cat Names (n=171)	93	78	54.38	104	60.81
Dog Names (n=76)	25	51	32.89	35	45.05
Difference between Cats and Dogs			21.49		15.76

is another important difference between cat and dog names. Cat names are not only more human; they are also more traditional and more frequent names in general. They contrast with dog names, which are more modern and less frequent as human names. Table 3 shows a sample of cat and dog names with their frequencies as a human name, which are taken from NND. The top 10 cat names that have the highest such frequency have a range of 736,103–27,370. This contrasts with the top 10 dog names with frequencies ranging between 43,267 and 600. The dog name that has the highest human name frequency is *Toprak*. It appears as the eighth name in the cat list.

Table 3: The Top Ten Cat and Dog Names and Their Frequency as Human Names

Cat Names	Frequency as A Human Name	Dog Names	Frequency as A Human Name
1 Ömer	736,103	Toprak	43,267
2 Melek	282,855	Arya	18,893
3 Leyla	219,248	Beyaz	13,027
4 Ege	130,525	Cesur	10,894
5 Ece	130,284	Paşa	10,226
6 Cem	80,384	Maya	4,924
7 Şakir	54,527	Balim	2,303
8 Toprak	43,267	Zeytin	1,066
9 Ferit	33,604	Lila	887
10 Zarife	27,370	Badem	600
Mean (n=171)	11,181.64	Mean (n=76)	1,449.541

These data suggest that dog names are less typical human names. It is also possible that names such as *Bulut* 'cloud' or *Cesur* 'brave' are given as names due to their lexical meanings: that is, they refer to the physical appearance or the character of the pet. They are not necessarily given to pets because of their popularity among the human names and in this respect they contrast with more traditional human names such as *Ömer*. Although there are both modern and traditional names among both the cat and dog names in the data, it is more common to find such modern names as dog names.

Domestic vs. Foreign Names

In the analysis above, when foreign human names were included, we observed a 6.43% increase in the cat group and a higher increase of 12.16% in the dog group. This finding suggests that dog names included more foreign names. The analysis on the domestic vs. foreign names confirms this result. Table 4 shows the numbers and proportions of cat and dog names that were domestic, mostly Turkish, and foreign. These scores include human as well as non-human names (e.g., Turkish/domestic *Ömer* or *Tarçın* 'cinnamon' and foreign *Max* or *Coffee*). As shown in Table 4, about half of the dog names (53.94%) are foreign. By contrast, a much smaller proportion (27.87%) of the cat names are foreign. A chi-square test run on the proportion of domestic vs. foreign names of cats and dogs indicated that dogs were significantly more likely to have foreign names ($\chi^2=16.064$, $N=247$, $p=.000061$).

Table 4: Domestic vs. Foreign Names and their Proportions

	Domestic	%	Foreign	%
Cat names (n=171)	124	72.52	47	27.48
Dog names (n=76)	35	46.06	41	53.94

Discussion

In this study, pet-naming practices in Turkey are examined with a particular focus on dog vs. cat names in order to investigate whether humanization through naming that is observed in the US and other western countries is observed in Turkey as well. A comparative study of dog and cat names is especially important because of the different status of dogs and cats in Turkish society. We observed that there was no overlap at all, if we look at the most popular pet names and compare them to the most popular human names drawn from the official birth registration records. So, in this study, Turkish-speaking pet owners do not appear to select their pet names from the most popular human names. However, a closer look at the pet names also revealed that they included names that can be given to humans, although they were not necessarily among the most frequent human names. In terms of the proportion of human vs. non-human categories, the names given to dogs and cats were not less human than those given by pet-owners in the US, especially when the foreign names were included (Abel 2007).

We further examined a set of data collected through surveys and observed a difference between dog and cat names. Dogs, when compared to cats, were less likely to have human names. Their names were relatively less frequent and traditional and were also more likely to include foreign names. Abel (2007) suggested that those animals that have restricted access to human home environments were less likely to have human names. In the US, not only were dogs and cats given more human names, but also there was no difference between dogs and cats in this respect, and this was related to their similarity in terms of their access to homes (e.g., Abel 2007). However, the present results cannot be attributed to the fact that dogs in Turkey have potentially less access to home environments due to their lowly status in traditional Islam. Based on the self-reports of the pet owner participants in the study, we know that there was no difference between the dogs' and cats' access to homes and the attitude of the pet owners towards their pets. Both groups of pets were considered family members and were treated as such. Both cats and dogs roamed freely in their human homes. Consequently, the results reported here may be indicative of the modern status of the dogs vs. cats in Turkish society. Once considered impure, pet dogs seem to have become esteemed symbols of modernization, secularism and westernization.

Traditionally, cats have always had free access to homes in Turkey, whereas dogs only started sharing homes with their owners much later, thanks to the westernization movements in the country. Having a pet dog at home is observed only in relatively less religious homes, where family members adopt a more secular point of view (Gündoğdu 2023; Kafalı 2022). In the present study, the naming pattern we observed complements this observation regarding the increasing symbolic status of dogs. Because dogs are symbols of a more modern and western life style, for many Turkish pet owners, it may be only natural to give them more modern and western names, which happen to include foreign names. At the same time, because dogs are more likely to have foreign names, they are less likely to share their names with the human members of the family.

Similar pet-naming practices, that is, giving foreign names to pets, has also been observed in other cultures where animals are not typically given local human names. Chen (2017) reports that the participants in her study conducted in Taiwan do not give Chinese human names to their pets, but they do give common English (or non-Chinese) human names (e.g., *Anna*, *Billy*, *Harry*) as well as the names of US presidents, (e.g., *Obama* and *Bush*), and the names of sitcom movie characters. In Chen (2017), fifty-one (16% of all the names) fell into this category. This study also noted that it was common to have English nicknames in Taiwan due to the extensive English language education system and such names can be given to pets as well. Foreign names could be considered examples of humanization although they were not analyzed as such in Chen (2017). In addition, Chen also observed that some kinship terms, which are typically used among family members, were used to form pet names. Some pet names Chen identified consisted of a first name and a family surname. All of these patterns provide further evidence for a tendency to humanize pet names in Taiwan, although such a trend was not as obvious and direct as that observed in western countries.

Yagafarova (2021) reports that Bashkir people, as well, occasionally give foreign human names, Russian names, such as *Mauka* 'Masha', *Zoýka* 'Zoyka', and *Nyörka* 'Nyurka', to their animals although such names are not typically observed among human family members. A similar trend is reported for the cat-naming practices in Saudi Arabia. Alqarni (2022) observes that while domestic cats are more likely to have Arabic names, non-domestic cats, those that are described as "purchased" by Alqarni (2022) have mostly foreign names. In Iran, too, where regulations based on Islam are more strict than in Turkey, having dogs is frowned upon because it is considered a symbol of a western lifestyle. Despite that fact, there are quite a number of dog owners in the country and it looks like they also prefer foreign names for their pets. The names of the dogs that are mentioned in an interview with dog owners published in *Iran International* (<https://wwwiranintl.com/en/202312220914>) are all English names: *Snow*, *Toffee*, *Woody*, *Leo*. All these examples from other cultures suggest that the practice of giving pet dogs western or foreign names is not a

phenomenon restricted only in Turkey. Importantly, in Turkey, as is the case in many other countries, European names are symbols of not only westernization and modernity, but also otherness. By giving a pet a foreign/European name, pet owners humanize their dogs and cats, while at the same time, creating distance from their traditional home culture. In contrast to what has been assumed, then, pet-names can be humanized without making direct reference to an intimate relationship and/or family membership.

Conclusion

We can say that there is a general and universal humanization trend in pet-naming practices, but it is observed in different degrees across different cultures, and as it is the case in Turkey, it may be interrupted due to social, cultural or religious attitudes of the speech community. Animals have always been given human names, even in ancient times as documented by Nowak (2015). Historical documents suggest that pet animals, especially those that belonged to the nobility and higher socio-economic classes, not only enjoyed the domestic home environments, but they were also granted names that were typically observed in humans or they were named after humans (Walker-Meikle 2012; Franklin 1999). In the US and other European countries, this trend reached a level where newborn names and pet names overlap to a great extent. Elsewhere, humanization in pet names is observed in various degrees but at a slower pace, and various cultural and social factors interact with the naming practices. The recognition of pet animals as individuals through naming without granting them a human status is most probably an even earlier phase. Further research is necessary across different geographical locations and languages to confirm this observation.

The results here complement the observation of the symbolic status of dogs in modern Turkish society. However, we can still ask whether dogs have foreign or less traditional names because of their symbolic status as dogs. Pet-naming trends may rather reflect the pet-owners' worldview. Bergien (2016, 87) who suggests that pet names can be seen as "seismographic instruments in a changing society" states that pet owners see their pets as a part of their extended self. In other word, pet names reflect the way pet owners view themselves in the contemporary world. Assuming that is the case dogs in Turkey may be more likely to have foreign names not because they are dogs, but because, in Turkey, dog owners, in contrast to cat owners, may have a particular worldview and perception of themselves as less traditional or more modern. The names we give ourselves and our pets say much about the way we see the world and the way we wish to be seen.

Notes

¹. Both sets of data that include the lists of the names and their frequencies can be accessed at the Open Science Framework platform in the following address:
https://osf.io/zpyk6/?view_only=b571221a98dc4eccabeb65e86adfoob1.

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