

## Kyrgyz Personal Names as Units of Cultural Code

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with some of the main peculiarities of modern Kyrgyz personal names, such as inner meaning or motivation of the act of naming, which gives categorical information on gender, culture, history, traditions and stereotypical associations of the Kyrgyz people. It corresponds to the proposition, in which some elements get an explication in the name as a basis and attribute of the name. There are some important issues in the motivation stage of Kyrgyz personal names, in recent trends in Kyrgyz personal name formation and rhyming (harmony) in Kyrgyz personal names, as well as in the traditions, innovations and unique creativity in naming. All of the above mentioned factors and the content richness of Kyrgyz personal names are reflected in the structural complexity which is explained by the anthroponymic components, formants and elements, occurring in one-, two- and three-component anthroponyms.

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Over the last ten years, one can observe a surge of interest in proper names in the discipline of linguistics. This interest includes personal names which can be explained by the growth of anthropocentrism in the area of language studies and by a shift of stress towards the cultural and social aspects of linguistic studies.

Personal names as a naming of individual subjects corresponds to the unique word layer that is in a special interrelation with common nouns. Personal names differ from other nouns in the individualization of an object in the limited list of names and often changeable repertoire depending on sociocultural facts (Superanskaya 1969; Jartseva 1990).

In connection with this point scholars have noticed that a personal name is not just an indication of an object (see works by Florensky, Losev, Lotman and Toporov). It is impossible not to agree with Toporov who writes that "...in all spheres of human spiritual life...the role of the name is not just large but particular. What can be registered and stated forms only a surface layer of that secret which is related to a name. Just touching this surface layer implies a depth of this secret and such a power which is inseparable from it..." (cited in Fedorova 2005: 235).

Personal names reflect a centuries-old history of a particular people, a picture of the world (or one of its parts), and also the world outlook of people or how people see and want to see themselves. In other words, these lexemes can be considered as a sign in which culture is represented in compressed form. Actually the Personal Name System of any language bears an imprint of the national self-consciousness of a people and forms a national picture of their world. Names reflect the main characteristics of a national culture, of its traditions and of the customs of a people.

We refer to Losev's idea concerning names that all our life, all human beings, every aspect of culture is reflected in names; all our cultural wealth that has accumulated for centuries is contained in a name (Losev 1997: 28).

Personal names being the compound cultural sign of a language are considered a main means of expression and form the mnemonic function of culture (Lotman 1994: 5). We can come across

similar ideas in the works of Superanskaya who writes that names are the property of humanity and they are determined not only by languages in which they are created or used, but also by various aspects of spiritual and material culture (Superanskaya 2007: 134). Toporov notes that a name also forms a pulse of a culture. As far as the name is concerned, it puts a person into the sphere of a sign and also shows that it is a result of culture in which its meanings are increasing. Thus it has been stated that the name is supported and controlled by culture (Fedorova 2005: 237).

In any culture the name of a person acts as a sociocultural sign and as a unit of a cultural code. Culture is denoted as a historically defined level of society and human development, just as people also created material and spiritual values. In the narrow sense of the word, culture refers to the sphere of a people's spiritual life (BSE 1973: 594). Lotman defines culture as an organized sign system that is a historically formed bundle of a semiotic system in which the signs and meanings are synthesized (Lotman 2004: 396–397). In order to realize its meanings, culture borrows signs from nature, artifacts, and the inner and outer world of a human being.

Hence it follows that in culture, cultural codes are organized and regulated – that is the sign system of the spiritual and material world becomes the bearer of cultural meanings. A cultural code is a combination of verbal and nonverbal signs representing the world picture of present society. An important part of the world picture is presented in the form of concepts, which we can study as the cultural code – a combination of cultural concepts and means of materialization.

A cultural code represents a heterogeneous formation. Examples of types of cultural codes are: cosmological, vegetation, zoomorphic, environmental, anthropomorphic, objects and things, architectural, somatic, gastronomic/culinary, food and flowers (Gudkov 2007: 9). It means that these or other objects of the world around us acquire in our mind a special symbolism and begin to act as signs of culture. Accordingly lexical units, their designators, besides having a direct function of object indicators may acquire additional sociocultural meanings.

So, in many cultures the lion, eagle, or wolf symbolize authority and power, the hare – cowardice, the pigeon – peace, a bridge, a link, communication, or connection. A tree is not just a plant, but also a symbol of life, longevity and branching out, such as a generation (hence, the concept of a family tree). Some specific symbols can, probably, be considered to be universal; however, there exist such objects which are endowed with specific properties within the limits of certain national cultures.

Clear national specificity is shown in a zoomorphic code of culture. For example, a pig for a Russian person is associated with untidiness, and for a Kyrgyz person with a fat, crude, clumsy person. The hare in Russian culture is endowed with the trait of “cowardice”, and in Kyrgyz it is “speed”. Such animals as wolf, snake and bear have special cultural meaning for Kyrgyz people, because in mythological consciousness they are considered ancestors of some Kyrgyz tribes.

Also, a significant unit of the zoomorphic cultural code is the deer which for Kyrgyz people serves as a symbol of kindness, memory and motherly love. So, one of the central myths of Kyrgyz culture narrates how a female deer saves the life of two babies and breastfeeds them, thus helping them to miraculously survive after a cruel battle. Their descendants, as the legend says, were settled on the coast of the Lake Yssyk-Kul and till now they consider themselves as children of Mother Deer and call their tribe *Bugu* (in Kyrgyz ‘deer’) (Ajtmatov 1983: 10; Gaziev 2003: 82–89). It is an explanation of the appearance of such personal names as *Bugu* ‘deer’, *Buguke* (‘deer’ + anthropo-component *-[a]ke*), *Bugubay* (‘deer’ + anthropo-component *bay*), *Bugubek* (‘deer’ + anthropo-component *bek*).

As the above mentioned examples show, personal names can be considered as special units of a verbal cultural code. On the one hand, the given lexemes form their own anthropomorphic cultural code on the basis of a name showing a phenomenon of anthropomorphism – i.e., an identification of the person and other objects by some features, correlation of behaviors,

characteristics of the person with natural phenomena, subjects, plants, animals and so on. On the other hand, personal names keeping their own clear motivation or, as stated by Potebnya, their inner form, are able obviously to show units of other cultural codes and, accordingly, to act in a role of “transmitters” between various cultural codes – both verbal, and nonverbal. Consequently, the structure and semantics of Kyrgyz personal names reflect, on the one hand, anthropomorphic concepts, and on the other, concepts, related to the units of other cultural codes, e.g., vegetative, or zoomorphic.

The structural and semantic analysis of Kyrgyz personal names has shown that along with the zoomorphic code, conceptual elements of the environmental code play a large role. Mountains in the Kyrgyz view are associated with sanctity, good, protection and rescue (hence such idiomatic expressions as “to have a heart similar to a mountain”, “kind as a mountain”, “to care or a care like a mountain”. Thus, using the root *too* ‘mountain’, there exist such male personal names as **Toobay**, **Tooashar**, **Toobek**, **Toolukbek**, **Tootay**, and **Toochu**.

Personal names also reflect a corporal/body/somatic code. We note that specificity of a somatic code is defined by its universality as applied to anatomy and physiology of all human beings. Thus, one can not overlook differences in corporal codes in one or another linguacultural community. So, Gudkov, referring to Russian culture, defines ‘forehead’ as the head as a whole, the carrier and keeper of the mind and mental faculties of a person (2007: 221). In contrast, in Kyrgyz culture the forehead corresponds, first of all, to destiny, life, success and luck. Similar features can be noted, in our opinion, in the description of the semantics of Kyrgyz personal names, and also in studying given lexemes as units of a cultural code.

In the table below, we show some results of the analysis of Kyrgyz male and female names, reflecting the role of cultural codes and relating these to concepts in the given lexical units:

№	Types of cultural code	Cultural concepts	Kyrgyz personal male names	Kyrgyz personal female names
1	Cosmological code	moon, sun, star	<i>Aybolot</i> : <i>ay</i> ‘moon’ + <i>bolot</i> ‘will be’; <i>Kuntuudu</i> : <i>Kun</i> ‘sun’ + <i>tuudu</i> ‘gave birth’; <i>Zhyldyzbek</i> : <i>zhyldyz</i> ‘star’ + <i>bek</i> ‘title of a ruler’.	<i>Ayzhamal</i> : <i>ay</i> ‘moon’ + <i>zhamal</i> ‘beautiful’; <i>Kunsultan</i> : <i>kun</i> ‘sun’ + <i>sultan</i> ‘sovereign’; <i>Zhyldyzkha</i> : <i>zhyldyz</i> ‘star’ + <i>kan</i> ‘khan, blood’; <i>Cholpon</i> : ‘Venus’.
2	Vegetation code	tree, apple, grape, pomegranate, flower.	<i>Bayterek</i> : <i>bay</i> ‘very rich person’ + <i>terek</i> ‘tree’; <i>Anarbek</i> : <i>anar</i> ‘pomegranate’ + <i>bek</i> ‘title of a ruler’; <i>Gulzhigit</i> : <i>gul</i> ‘flower’ + <i>jigit</i> ‘fellow’.	<i>Chynarkyz</i> : <i>Chynar</i> ‘name of a long living beautiful tree growing in Asia’ + <i>kyz</i> ‘girl’; <i>Anara</i> : <i>anar</i> ‘pomegranate’ + <i>a</i> ‘anthropo-element’; <i>Almagul</i> : <i>alma</i> ‘apple’ + <i>gul</i> ‘flower’; <i>Zhuzumkan</i> : <i>zhuzum</i> ‘grape’ + <i>khan</i> ‘khan, blood’; <i>Gulzhan</i> : <i>gul</i> ‘flower’ + <i>zhan</i> ‘spirit’.

3	Zoomorphic code	deer, wolf, lion, snake, eagle.	<i>Bugubay</i> : <i>bugu</i> ‘deer’ + <i>bay</i> ‘very rich person’; <i>Bourbay</i> : <i>boru</i> ‘wolf’ + <i>bay</i> ‘very rich person’; <i>Arstanbek</i> : <i>arstan</i> ‘lion’ + <i>bek</i> ‘title of a ruler’; <i>Burkutbek</i> : <i>burkut</i> ‘eagle’ + <i>bek</i> ‘title of a ruler’.	<i>Akmaral</i> : <i>ak-</i> ‘white’ + <i>maral</i> ‘a kind of deer’; <i>Aktuygun</i> : <i>ak</i> ‘white’ + <i>tuygun</i> ‘hawk’.
4	Environmental code	mountain, lake, river.	<i>Tooke</i> : <i>too</i> ‘mountain’ + ( <i>a</i> ) <i>ke</i> ‘uncle, elder brother’; <i>Kolbay</i> : <i>kol</i> ‘lake’ + <i>bay</i> ‘very rich person’; <i>Zhayloo</i> : Kyrgyz summer habitation.	<i>Dariakhan</i> : <i>daria</i> ‘river’ + <i>khan</i> ‘blood, khan’.
5	Code of things, objects	gold, silver, earrings, pearl.	<i>Altyngoz</i> : <i>altyn</i> ‘gold’ + <i>koz</i> ‘eye’; <i>Temirkozho</i> : <i>temir</i> ‘iron’ + <i>kozho</i> ‘owner’; <i>Topchubay</i> : <i>topchu</i> ‘button’ + <i>bay</i> ‘very rich person’.	<i>Altyngul</i> : <i>altyn</i> ‘gold’ + <i>gul</i> ‘flower’; <i>Nurkumush</i> : <i>nur</i> ‘glitter’ + <i>kumush</i> ‘silver’; <i>Syrga</i> : ‘earrings’; <i>Akbermet</i> : <i>ak</i> ‘white’ + <i>bermet</i> ‘pearl, mother-of-pearl’; <i>Aymonchok</i> : <i>ay</i> ‘moon’ + <i>monchok</i> ‘necklace’.
6	Body code	head, hair, eyes.	<i>Koengoz</i> : <i>koen</i> ‘hare’ + <i>koz</i> ‘eye’; <i>Elbashy</i> : <i>el</i> ‘people’ + <i>bashy</i> ‘head’.	<i>Akylay</i> : <i>akyl</i> ‘mind’ + <i>ay</i> ‘moon’; <i>Zhibekchach</i> : <i>zhibek</i> ‘silk’ + <i>chach</i> ‘hair’; <i>Karakoz</i> : <i>kara</i> ‘black’ + <i>koz</i> ‘eye’.
7	Gastronomic code	bread, milk, honey.	<i>Suticher</i> : <i>sut</i> ‘milk’ + <i>icher</i> ‘drinks’; <i>Nan</i> ‘bread’.	<i>Aselgul</i> : <i>asel</i> ‘honey’ + <i>gul</i> ‘flower’; <i>Balsheker</i> : <i>bal</i> ‘honey’ + <i>sheker</i> ‘sugar’; <i>Nan</i> : ‘bread’.
8	Flower code	rose, lily, aster, jasmine, poppy.		<i>Kyrgaldak</i> : ‘poppy’; <i>Roza</i> : ‘rose’; <i>Lilia</i> : ‘lily’; <i>Astra</i> : ‘aster’.
9	Colour code	white, black	<i>Karamyrza</i> : <i>kara</i> ‘black’ + <i>myrza</i> ‘gentleman’; <i>Karabaatyr</i> : <i>kara</i> ‘black’ + <i>baatyr</i> ‘hero’.	<i>Akmoor</i> : <i>ak</i> ‘white’ + <i>moor</i> ‘seal’; <i>Akzhurek</i> : <i>ak</i> ‘white’ + <i>zhurek</i> ‘heart’.

Table 1. Cultural codes in Kyrgyz male and female personal names

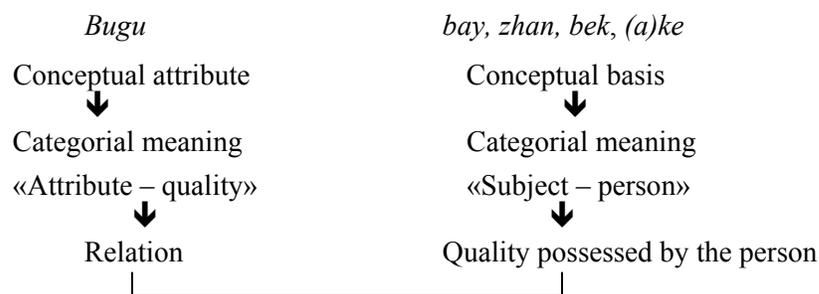
As shown in Table 1, in female and male personal names of the Kyrgyz language, concepts are reflected from various cultural codes, such as cosmological, vegetative, zoomorphic, environmental, body, gastronomic, flower, and colour. As a whole, the given codes are present in approximately equal numbers in both female and male groups of names. However, we can notice that elements of the flower code appear infrequently in Kyrgyz male personal names. In contrast, Kyrgyz female personal names rarely reflect zoomorphic and environmental codes.

In order to reveal similarities and differences in female and male names, it is necessary to take into account not only the presence of semantic concepts from various cultural codes. It is important as well to show in what relation the various concepts relate to each other within a word. This is especially significant in the Kyrgyz language as the majority of personal names represent complex units in which there are explicit connotations pertaining to some concepts.

While analyzing the lexemes which interest us, following Kubryakova, we applied concepts using a conceptual (onomasiological) basis and attribute. Such an approach was offered for the first time by Dokulil in the description of a derivative word. He noted that formation of a derivative word is done by means of onomasiological categories forming the basis of the creative act of naming – onomasiological basis (forming the basis of naming of the subject of a designation) and onomasiological attribute (describing how the basis is characterized) (Kubrjakova 2008a: 100).

Serebrennikov states that “before giving a name to any subject it is necessary to know first what you are going to name” (1977: 16). Therefore a choice of the onomasiological basis, as Kubryakova emphasizes, “is not only to simply allocate that which is subject to a designation, in the form of separate essence, but also to its identification as a subject, process, qualities or properties, etc. And the choice of the onomasiological attribute is defined as a choice of that individual characteristic which the designated subject possesses as different from other subjects of the same conceptual category, and at the same time that which reminds the person of another familiar subject or phenomenon” (2008a: 101). Kubrjakova stresses also the onomasiological predicate that forms the connecting link between basis and attribute in one proposition.

Let us illustrate the concepts using the conceptual basis, showing both the attribute and the predicate in examples of the male personal names *Bugubay*, *Buguke*, *Buguzhan* and *Bugubek*:



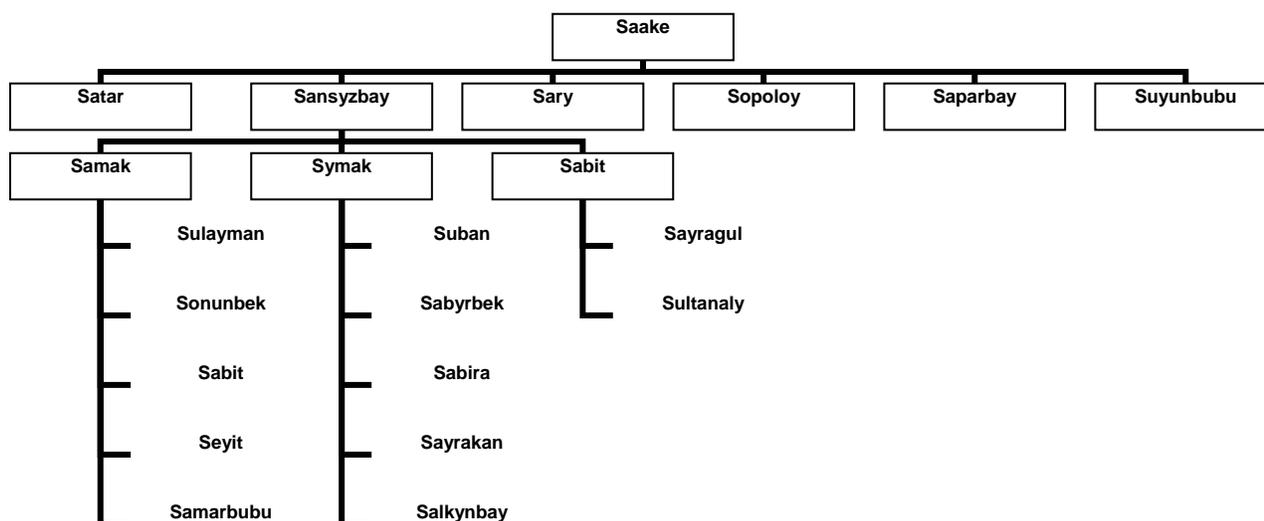
In the given example, the anthropological concepts “person”, “husband”, “man”, “the elder brother” act as a conceptual basis correlating with formants *bay*, *bek*, *zhan*, *(a)ke*. The zoomorphic concept *Bugu* ‘deer’ acts in the role of the onomasiological attribute. We should point out again that in the Kyrgyz culture *Bugu* ‘deer’ symbolizes such “human” qualities as kindness, piety, good nature, sincerity, kind-heartedness and love. The conceptual predicate is implied by way of comparison and inference: “The man is similar to a deer and possesses kindness, sincerity and such other qualities.”

On the whole, a comparison of male and female personal names reveals certain differences in the character of explicit conceptual bases and attributes in the groups of nouns that we examined. So, as a basis in male personal names there are concepts, such as “man”, and “mister” and as

attributes, there are concepts of zoomorphic, environmental, cosmological and body codes (deer, wolf, eagle, mountain, lake, sun, head).

In the matter of linking concepts, female names are more heterogeneous: the basis and attribute can belong to different cultural codes. For example, in the name *Akzhurok* one has combined the colour concept *ak* ‘white’ (attribute) with the body concept *zhurek* ‘heart’ (basis). In the formation of the majority of Kyrgyz female personal names, there appear mainly concepts of the following codes: flower, cosmological, gastronomic, body and zoomorphic (e.g., gold, silver, pearls, rose, poppy, the moon, honey, sugar, eyes, hair, deer). And these concepts can apply to both a conceptual basis or to a conceptual attribute. This sometimes complicates their differentiation while analyzing the lexemes (for example, *Balsheker* (*bal* ‘honey’ + *sheker* ‘sugar’). We believe, that in such cases, a complex attribute is indicated in the name (sugar + honey), and basis ‘the woman, the girl’ is implied.

One of the main unique peculiarities of Kyrgyz names is the rhyming and alliteration of names. In looking at alliteration in Kyrgyz personal names, one comes across such an interesting case of a Kyrgyz family where all personal names of *Saake*’s children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren begin with the same sound [s]: *Satar*, *Sansyzbay*, *Sary*, etc. (see Table 2). (Zhaparov 1992: 14).



**Table 2. Alliteration in the personal names of Saake’s children**

A few words about rhyming of Kyrgyz names which has generally two types: end rhyming and inner rhyming.

**1. End rhyming** is formed by phonetic-morphological means. Names can be rhymed fully or partially. Such anthropo-components and anthropo-formants as *ay*, *bek*, *gul*, *-din*, *-mira*, *-iya*, *-ya*, etc., may act as rhyming elements.

*Partial rhyming*; the word “partial” refers to the fact when in a specific group of names only some of the names rhyme with each other, for example in the following group of names of the children of the same family only the names of the daughters are rhymed, **Damira**, **Zamira**, **Gulmira**.

*Anarkan*, *Aslan*, *Tolokul*, *Urul*, *Elboldu*, **Damira**, **Zamira**, **Gulmira**.

*Full rhyming*; the word “full” refers to the fact when in a specific group of names all the names rhyme with each other. Here are the names of the children of three families in which all names are fully rhymed, for example, **Nuradin**, **Miradin** and **Eradin** are brothers and **Kaliya**, **Shuriya**, **Saliya** and **Urkuya** are sisters in another family.

1. *Nuradin, Miradin, Eradin,*
2. *Kamil, Zhamil, Shamil, Emil,*
3. *Kaliya, Shuriya, Saliya, Urkuya.*

**2. Inner rhyming** is formed by lexico-semantic means; here “inner rhyming” does not refer to sound correspondence, but to an inner cohesion between names in a specific group. Thus, some parents do not simply name their children, they also design the names in such a manner that they make up sentences and maybe even a full text; as an example, there are six children in one Kyrgyz family: *Tuboluk, Tynchtyk, Bolsun, Elderge, Chyndyk* and *Kaalaym*. These names are joined through their meaning.

*Tuboluk* ‘Forever’, *Tynchtyk* ‘Peace’, *Bolsun* ‘Let it be’,  
*Elderge* ‘For the People’, *Chyndyk* ‘Truth, Justice’, *Kaalaym* ‘I wish’.

The names of these individuals put together form two sentences:

Tuboluk Tynchtyk Bolsun – ‘Let it be Peace Forever’.  
 Elderge Chyndyk Kaalaym – ‘I wish Justice for The People’.

The examples given do not exemplify the total extent of Kyrgyz naming practice; on the contrary, it is only a tiny part of that unique creativity inherent in the naming among the Kyrgyz people. The main message in naming seems to be a strong desire and wish for eternal peace, truth and justice towards not only one person but all humanity.

So, the Kyrgyz male and female personal names representing a proposition (Kubryakova 2008: 124–138) contain in their conceptual bases and attributes cultural concepts from several cultural codes – cosmological, vegetative, environmental, body, zoomorphic, flower, colour, gastronomy and things. Thus character and combination of concepts varies depending on the gender of the person referred to by a personal name.

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