

LINGUACULTURAL AND COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF ETHONYMS

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Abstract. This article explores the linguacultural aspects of ethonyms, highlighting their significance in reflecting and shaping cultural identities and social dynamics. Ethonyms, or names given to ethnic groups, are more than mere labels; they carry deep cultural, social, and historical meanings. The discussion covers how ethonyms serve as markers of identity, reflect stereotypes and connotations, and are influenced by language policies and official recognition. The distinction between endonyms and exonyms underscores the power dynamics in naming practices. The article also delves into the historical and social contexts of ethonyms, their role in national identity, and their reflection of linguistic diversity.

Key words: Ethonyms, Linguacultural aspects, Cultural identity, Stereotypes, Language policy, Endonyms, National identity, Linguistic diversity, Indigenous ethonyms, Romani ethonyms, African diaspora

Introduction. Ethonyms, or names for ethnic groups, play a significant role in language and culture. These terms reflect not only the identities of the groups they denote but also the perceptions and attitudes of the societies that use them. This article explores the linguacultural and cognitive aspects of ethonyms, examining how they shape and are shaped by cultural and cognitive processes.

Ethonyms are deeply embedded in cultural contexts and reflect a society's historical, social, and cultural experiences. For example, the term "Eskimo" was widely used by outsiders to refer to certain Arctic indigenous peoples, but it has largely been replaced by "Inuit" in Canada and Greenland, reflecting a shift towards using self-identifying terms and acknowledging the importance of indigenous perspectives.

Ethonyms often carry connotations that can be either positive or negative, depending on historical and social contexts. These connotations can influence how groups are perceived and treated. For instance, the term "Gypsy" can evoke romanticized images of freedom and music but also stereotypes of criminality and rootlessness. The preferred term "Roma" is part of a broader effort to combat these stereotypes and promote a more accurate and respectful understanding.

Language policies can impact the use of ethonyms. Official recognition of certain ethnic groups often involves formalizing the terms used to refer to them. In multilingual countries like India, ethonyms are officially recognized in multiple languages, reflecting the country's linguistic diversity and the need for inclusive representation.

The distinction between endonyms (self-designated names) and exonyms (names given by others) highlights the power dynamics in naming. Endonyms are often preferred as they respect the identity and self-perception of the group. For example, "Sioux" is an exonym given by outsiders, while "Lakota" or "Dakota" are endonyms used by the people themselves.

The distinction between endonyms (names used by the group themselves) and exonyms (names given by outsiders) highlights power dynamics in naming practices. Endonyms are generally preferred as they respect the group's self-identification. For instance, the term "Lakota" is an endonym for a Native American group, while "Sioux" is an exonym. The preference for endonyms aligns with a more respectful and accurate representation of ethnic identities.

Ethonyms are deeply embedded in historical and social contexts. They can change over time in response to shifting social attitudes and political dynamics. For example, the term "Negro" was widely used in the early 20th century but has largely been replaced by "Black" or "African American" in the United States. These changes reflect evolving understandings of race and identity and efforts to use terms that are more empowering and respectful.

In some cases, ethonyms are linked to national identity and sovereignty. The use of "Tibetan" instead of "Tibetan-Chinese" can reflect political and cultural claims to autonomy and distinct identity. Similarly, the use of "Kurd" rather than "Turkish Kurd" or "Iraqi Kurd" underscores the distinct ethnic identity and aspirations for greater recognition and autonomy.

Ethonyms often reflect the linguistic diversity within a country or region. For example, in multilingual countries like Switzerland, the names for ethnic groups might be recognized in multiple languages, reflecting the country's commitment to linguistic equality. This multilingual recognition can help promote social cohesion and respect for all linguistic and ethnic groups.

The transition from using "Indian" to specific tribal names such as "Navajo" or collective terms like "First Nations" and "Native American" represents efforts to acknowledge the diversity and unique identities of indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada.

The shift from "Gypsy" to "Roma" in Europe is part of broader initiatives to counteract centuries of prejudice and promote a more accurate and respectful understanding of Romani culture and identity.

Terms like "African American" in the United States or "Afro-Caribbean" in the UK reflect the complex histories and cultural identities of people of African descent in diaspora contexts. These terms emphasize both their African heritage and their distinct cultural evolution in new environments.

Ethonyms are central to the cognitive process of social categorization. They help individuals and societies categorize people into groups, which simplifies social interactions but can also lead to essentializing identities and overlooking individual differences. This cognitive simplification can reinforce in-group and out-group dynamics.

According to prototype theory, certain members of an ethnic group are seen as more representative of the category than others. For instance, within the category "Asian," individuals from East Asia might be more prototypical in some Western contexts, influencing how people perceive and generalize about the group as a whole.

Ethonyms often carry conceptual metaphors that shape how ethnic groups are understood. For example, describing a group as "tribal" might invoke metaphors of primitiveness or savagery, whereas "nation" might evoke notions of sovereignty and civilization. These metaphors influence social attitudes and policies towards these groups.

Cognitive linguistics explores how language shapes thought. Ethonyms, through repeated use and socialization, become part of the cognitive schemas that individuals use to navigate social realities. The way ethonyms are framed in discourse (e.g., media, education) can significantly impact public perception and intergroup relations.

Conclusion. Ethonyms are more than mere labels; they are powerful tools that reflect and shape cultural identities and cognitive processes. Understanding the linguacultural and cognitive aspects of ethonyms is essential for fostering respectful and accurate representations of ethnic groups. As societies become more aware of the implications of these terms, there is a growing movement towards using ethonyms that honor the self-identification and cultural integrity of the groups they denote.

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