

Original Research Article

Sources of Offensive Nicknames in the Horan District in Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: May 09, 2020

Accepted: June 11, 2020

Volume: 3

Issue: 6

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.6.6

KEYWORDS

(offensive) nicknames, Horan district, Arabic dialects, sociolinguistics, sources.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the sources of offensive nicknames used by Jordanians in the Horan district from a sociolinguistic perspective. The sample consists of 150 nickname-users who live in the Horan district. A questionnaire was used for data collection. For data analysis, offensive nicknames were classified into many categories and then descriptively analyzed according to their sources. The study shows that these nicknames are associated with the nicknames' body features, unpleasant psychological traits, or sensitive events in the nicknames' lifetimes. The results of the study signify nicknames as a powerful tool by the hands of nickname users to show dominance over the nickname bearers. Nicknames in the rural regions in Jordan are extremely offensive and would negatively affect the nicknames' self-esteem. It is hoped that the results of the current study will open the door for other researchers to go deeper into examining this sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Introduction

Nicknames

In addition to official personal names, people may be given further names at certain points in their lives. These names are known as "nicknames". In the Anglo-American tradition, some nicknames are shorter forms of the first or second name of the person. These forms are standard; so 'Robert' can be nicknamed 'Bob', 'John' becomes 'Jack', 'Elizabeth' 'Betsy', 'Liza', or 'Liz', and so on. Nicknames are usually given by family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, relatives, and others within the same community in which people know each other's personalities and life events. Thus, *nickname*, as defined in *the Merriam Webster*, is "a name [...] that is different from your real name but is what your family, friends, etc., call you when they are talking to you or about you".

People are exposed to nicknaming at any point in their lives. They may be called by nicknames in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood periods. Some nicknames may change throughout these periods while others may stick to their bearers to death. In addition, each period seems to have its characteristics. For example, nicknames may be given by parents to their children conveying smallness. This kind of nicknames symbolizes a form of endearment and referred to as *diminutive* (Wilson, 1998: 280), while nicknames of affection between lovers are referred to as *hypocoristic* (Wilson, *ibid*). Turner (2001: 455) distinguishes between nicknames given to children from those given to adults. He states "children nicknames are 'semantically transparent', while those of adults are normally metaphorically descriptive nicknames which require some inside knowledge of the language to fully understand the intended metaphor which is intrinsic in the nickname". Though some nicknames represent endearment, not all of them are welcomed by the nicknames.

The present study is not concerned with nicknames that are derived from a diminutive of people's given name nor shorter name. Instead, it is concerned with those unofficial nicknames added or replace some persons' given names for a specific

reason in the person named (e.g. physical, mental, etc.) and representing no endearment. For example, *liṭram* 'deaf' and *ʔabu ḡadab* 'the one of anger' describe a hearing handicap and a person easily irritated, respectively.

Offensive Nicknames

In their descriptive role, nicknames may describe physical deformities or defects of the nicknamees, or they may symbolize unpleasant events in their lives. In the current study, the researcher presents nicknames that have negative connotations and imply no endearment. Such nicknames are said to be offensive and thus might hurt the feelings of the nicknames (Wilson (1997). Crozier (1999: 506) calls offensive nicknames *name-calling*, *unkind nicknames*, and *verbal harassment*. Wardat (1997, p. 31) says that most of the Jordanian nicknames are scurrilous and cynical. Bani Melhem (2002, p. 31) agrees and notices that "most of male Jordanian nicknames in the north are shameful, and the process of nicknaming is a bad social habit". Similarly, Haggan (2008) asserts that almost all Kuwaiti teenagers' nicknames are derogatory and hurtful.

Statement of the Study

Offensive nicknaming is a sociolinguistic phenomenon in the Jordanian rural communities, the Horan district in the north being one of them. Some people are known solely by their nicknames, not by their official names. (Cf. Bani Melhem, 2002, p. 31). The widespread popularity of nicknaming may be attributed to the strong relations between people in these communities, and the fact that they know about some of the private events that have taken place in each other's lives.

As the researcher has noticed, it is common to call someone in the Jordanian rural areas by a nickname. As has already been stated, the use of such nicknames may carry either a positive or negative meaning. Calling someone by a nickname he/she likes is a good thing while using offensive nicknames is unacceptable.

Questions of the Study

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the offensive nicknames used by Jordanians in the Horan district?
- 2) What are the sources of offensive nicknames?

Literature Review

Based on extensive research about sources of nicknaming, the researcher found that the process of nicknaming is widespread. Wilson (1998) found that nicknaming exists within small communities and villages whose populations involve close systems of interaction as in Scotland, in the fishing towns and villages whose populations kept themselves apart from those of the surrounding countryside. Nicknames include moral or behavioral traits. They may also be occupational names that qualify as first names or used alone. Nicknames, as Wilson points out, play an important role in stratification or class distinction within a community. For example, the rich peasants on the Greek island of Karpthos have nicknames deriving from positions in the prestigious religious hierarchy; middling peasants have neutral nicknames; and pejorative names reserved to the poor. In addition, nicknames reflect the social power that namers exert over the named and often given by leaders of social groups as an exercise of power.

Nicknaming phenomenon is observed within rural areas in North Jordan (Wardat, 1997; Bani Melhem, 2002; Al-Refai, 2007). A nickname has a descriptive role, that is, it "records some real features of the person named", to use Wilson's (1998: 280) words. The most common nicknames there may originate from physical appearance, psychological, and behavioral traits. Wardat (1997) concludes that Jordanian people use violent nicknames more than humorous ones and that nicknames given to women are less in number than those given to men. Bani Melhem (2002) found that one nickname may tell more than one thing of its bearer", e.g., *taabah* 'a ball' denotes shortness and fatness together. He found also that "a nickname may denote a group of people", e.g., *beet rajraj*. Female nicknames are excluded from this study since they, as he claims, are very few compared to men's and are "seemingly considered as taboo topic"(p. 16). The present researcher disagrees with Bani Melhem's previous statement and claims that female nicknames are common in the rural areas in Jordan and they cannot be excluded. Female nicknaming in Jordan was a topic of study conducted by Al-Refai (2007, p. 76). He explains that female nicknaming is "a valid area of study and investigation, as they comprise a phenomenon that exists and used in the rural societies".

The process of nicknaming is also common among school students (De Klerk and Bosch's, 1997; Kolawole, 2008; Kuranchie, 2012). Although many pet names given in the childhood period do survive to adolescence, new nicknames more commonly given by friends and classmates to indicate personal appearance and habits. However, both pet names and nicknames show linguistic innovation. In one study of educational psychology, Crozier and Dimmock (1999) observed unkind nicknames as one

of the most prevalent form of bullying among primary school children in South Wales, Britain. The nicknames disliked by children were examined and classified into six categories: references to the child appearance, psychological attributes, ethnic group membership, sexual connotations, animals, and nicknames related to the child's own name (e.g., rhyming). Moreover, nicknaming is common among university students (Filani and Melefa, 2014) and later given to school teachers (Crozier, 2002) to indicate behavioral pattern or physical trait.

In another study of a social phenomenon in web-based communication, Stommel (2007) demonstrates how nicknames used by participants in a German forum on eating function to construct identity, and how they may be related to eating disorders. He found that nicknames have denotational features and metaphorical uses that a nickname may denote a plant, star, or an animal. The nickname *pueppi23*, for instance, metaphorically denotes "silly, over-styled woman". He adds that a nickname may display both positive and negative features. For instance, the nickname *schattenvoegelchen* (small shadow bird), displays characteristics of smallness, lightness, and weightlessness. However, it also displays characteristics of hiding, depression, negative self-evaluation, and eating behavior (starvation).

Nicknames are also commonplace in sports (Abel, Ernest and Kruger, Michael, 2006). In a distinguished study, Abel, Ernest and Kruger, Michael (2006). They relate nicknames of baseball and nicknames in general to physical appearance (e.g. hair color, "red", one of the most common nicknames in baseball), ability (e.g. "golden arm"), behavior (e.g. "nasty boy"), geographical origins (e.g. "California whine"), ethnic origins (e.g. "Frenchy"), and phonetic variations (e.g. the rhyme in Dave "the Rave"). They conclude that "nicknames confer identity and reflect celebrity status [...] whether a nickname has positive or negative connotations. The process of nicknaming is common at the workplace (Fortado, 1998; Turner, 2001) to indicate physical appearance and behavior.

The above sources are called 'external formations' (Morgan et al, 1979) since they come from outside the linguistic form of the real name. If nicknames are based on the form of the real name, the process is called 'internal formation'. These include using rhymes, alliterations, and phonetic variations (e.g. the rhyme in Dave "the Rave") (Abel et al, 2006; Crozier & Dimmock, 1999).

Methodology

Population of the Study

The population of this study includes Jordanians who live in the villages of Horan in North Jordan especially the villages of Al-Turrah, Al-Shajarah, Imrawah, and Thonaibah.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the present study consists of 150 nickname-users who live in the Horan district. The researcher collected data randomly from the participants who are of different ages, genders, and levels of education. Based on the demographic distribution of population, the participants were selected as follows: 60 participants from Al-Turrah, 50 participants from Al-Shajarah, and 20 participants from each Imrawah and Thonaibah. The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 80. The participants were chosen from all parts of society in the district, women at homes and work, and men in their stores and the streets.

Data Collection

Offensive nicknames were collected from people in the villages in the Horan district. For data collection, two methods were used: a questionnaire to be filled by the nickname users, and the researcher's on observation.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire included a demographic section where the respondents had to give their gender, age, profession, and educational level. Then they were asked to write some offensive nicknames used in his/her village. Then they were asked about the source of nicknames. This questionnaire is a suitable tool that guarantees truthful results since the participants may feel less shy or conservative in writing them in an interview. This is especially true since many nicknames are offensive and using them can be embarrassing. However, the elderly did not mind and insisted to give their answers orally especially that most of them are illiterate. Besides, the researcher noticed that some participants mentioned some nicknames without knowing their sources. Therefore, she spent much time and effort in getting the source of some nicknames and failed in getting others, especially, those collected from the neighboring villages.

Observation

The researcher could not get help noticing certain facts since the respondents to the Questionnaire questions have not told the whole story. Therefore, she has added her own observations.

Procedures

The questions asked in the questionnaire were in Arabic and translated together with their answers into English. The participants were informed about the significance of the study for the researcher and its academic purpose. First names of the nickname-users were not given in line with the research ethics in keeping the identity of the subjects confidential.

Data analysis

The offensive nicknames were collected from people who live in the four villages in the Horan district. For data analysis, offensive nicknames were classified into many categories according to their sources. Then, the nicknames were descriptively analyzed according to their sources along with their statistical information.

Results and Discussion

Sources of Offensive Nicknames

The collected data show that offensive nicknames come from different sources. They come from the nickname's physical features, psychological and behavioral traits, occupation (Cf. Wardat, 1997), events and circumstances, habits and interests. However, some nicknames cannot be traced; the name is known but the source is not. Table (1) shows the sources of offensive nicknames in our data and the number of names found in each category.

Table 1: Sources of offensive nicknames

No.	Source	No.
1	Physical features	75
2	Psychological and behavioral traits	36
3	Occupation	8
4	Habits and interests	28
5	Events & circumstances	14
6	Unknown sources	20
	Total	181

Below is a discussion of these sources starting with physical features.

Physical Features

Nicknames based on physical features represent the largest group in our data adding up to 75 such names out of 181 for the whole data. Physical features can be divided into two sub-categories: body and appearance, and deformities. Each sub-category will be discussed based on its common distinctive features.

Body and Appearance

People are used to judge others based on their body and their appearance. Thus, nicknaming is one strategy that reflects how/what people see and think about each other. Body and appearance represent a wide source for nicknames and has contributed to giving different offensive nicknames. The collected data reflect different aspects of this source such as attire, shape of body or face, pronunciation and speech, and way of walking. Offensive nicknames in this sub-category add up to 48 names.

In some cases, a nickname could be given for more than one person. In our data, *ʔabu šaamih* 'the one with a mole' and *ʔabu iš- šawaarib* 'the one with mustache' are examples of nicknames of more than one person for they have the same physical features. *ʔabu il- balaajim* and *ʔumm il-balaajim* are similar nicknames given for male and female nicknamees since both have the same physical features: big, blown lips. Originally, *ʔabu* means 'father' and *ʔumm* 'mother', but in a use like this, the two words mean something like 'the one with'; *ʔabu* is masculine and *ʔumm* is feminine.

The reasons behind giving some nicknames are clear. For example, *ʔabu šaamih* has a mole in his face; *ʔabu iš-šawaarib* has a big mustache; and *ʔabu iš-šaʕur* has thick hair covering his skin. But the nickname *ʔabu ir-riiṣ* is a little less direct: the hair covering the namee's body is likened to feathers; a figure of speech, a metaphor, is involved here.

Our data show that the same physical feature can be the reason for more than one nickname. For example, *guzʕur* and *iš-šibir* are given to two different shorties. *guzʕur* indicates shortness and *iš-šibir* means 'the span of the hand'. *ʕali iṭ-ṭawiiil* 'Ali, the tall (one)' is a nickname of a tall man and another tall man is nicknamed *mooriinih* 'plank'. Two thin people are known one as *garguudih* (Cf. Wardat 1997: 48), a word that could describe, for example, a dry piece of bread, and the other as *greegir* (whose literal meaning is not known as far as I could tell). Another two fat women are nicknamed *wajid* and *jaʕbuurah*. The first nickname is likened to another fat woman living in the village, and the other nickname is likened to a kind of vegetables, Egyptian cucumber, which is close to a ball in its shape.

In addition, being a hulk is the source for four different nicknames and all of them are represented figuratively. For example, big size of the namee *ʔabu jamal* is likened to a camel, *id-dub* is likened to a bear, and *ħabaṭraṣ* is likened to a TV character (a giant) while *ij-juḡul* has unknown literal meaning as far as I could tell.

On the other hand, smallness is the source of seven nicknames. For example, *iħmad guṭmah* 'Ahmad (of) little bit', *iħmad il-xafiif* 'Ahmad, the light (one)', *il-gin* 'the chickens' coop', *ligneen* 'the tiny chickens' coop', *iz-zagadih* 'the-small-marble', *iṣ-ṣuuṣah* 'chick', and *ij-jug* (which could describe a small-sized animal) are nicknames of different small-sized persons.

Our data show that the same person could be given more than one nickname for having the same physical feature. For example, a small person is given two different nicknames *iħmad il-xafiif* 'Ahmad, the light (one)' and *iz-zagadih* 'the small marble'.

Size is not the only physical feature involved in nicknaming. Hair style and attire can also give nicknames. *kuʕbuṣ* 'fuzzy with uncombed, probably thick hair' and *gurʕuṭ* '(either) with short hair (or) with curly hair like small rings' are two nicknames representing hair quality and appearance: the namees do not take good care of their hair and leave it uncombed. *librins* (clearly from English *prince*) refers to the namee's elegance likening him to princes, who are supposed to be well-dressed since they belong to royal families. *handuuma* (related to *hindaam* 'elegant attire') is also related to elegance. Interestingly, however, both names (*librins* and *handuuma*) are used ironically: both nicknames are sloven and very far from elegance.

As some people are nicknamed for their unpleasant hair and attire qualities, some others are nicknamed for their unpleasant skin and tooth features. *xalaf lijrab* 'khalaf, the scabby (one)', *libraṣ* 'the one with vitiligo', and *ʔabu iṣ-ṣadaf* 'the one with skin patches (lit. sea shells or mother-of-pearl)' are three nicknames representing skin quality: the namees were exposed to skin diseases characterized by patches of abnormal skin. *ʔabu is-suus* 'the one with tooth decay' refers to the namee's bad teeth.

Some offensive nicknames in our data describe people's ways of walking. For example, *ʔabu ṭaafiṣ* 'the clumsy (one)', is supposed to walk carelessly not worried whether he steps in mud, hits a stone or someone, falls in a hole, etc. *baskaleet* 'bicycle' walks very quickly unlike *il-liṭṭ* 'the slow (one) who never moves from where he is unless he moves with hesitation and very slowly'. *il-gammaaz* 'the hopper (one)' walks in short steps more like one who makes small jumps as he walks. *iḏ-ḏabuʕ* 'the hyena' walks more like a beast looking for a prey with his head down.

Some people are nicknamed after well-known characters who have qualities or appearance in common with the namees. These characters are said to be public figures whom people used to watch or talk about in their conversations. For example, *ḡawwaar* is a nickname given to a person who looks like a comic TV character since both the namee and the TV star wear similar glasses. *ʕleeṣ* was nicknamed as a child after a TV character for he had the same blown checks; the namee is now grown up and no longer resembles that character but he is still known with this nickname. *iṣ-zaaṣa* is nicknamed after an officer in the same town because he has the same facial and body expressions. *ṭlaaṣ* resembles a Syrian politician and thus he was nicknamed after that politician. Some persons are identified by the names of certain cartoon characters whose faces or bodies cause laughter such as *ʕabsi* and *ṭam-ṭam*. These characters are popular among children as well as adults.

Similarly, certain peculiarities in talking and pronunciation can be represented in nicknames. For example, a person was nicknamed *it-turr* because, when he was a child, he mispronounced the Arabic consonant /k/ as /t/. Instead of saying *il-kurr* 'a small donkey', he would say *it-turr*. Another person mispronounced the Arabic consonant /g/ as /d/. Instead of saying *giriṣ* (a piaster), he would say *diriṣ*, and thus, he was nicknamed *id-diriṣ* (the piaster). He uttered this word as a child and now, at eighty he is still identified with this nickname. Also, *il-xanba* 'the one with a nasal voice' was nicknamed so because a health problem

with her nose caused her voice to go out or vibrate from the nose. *ir-raṭṭaan* 'the one with foreign speech' has speech disorder; he utters words quickly, and his pronunciation is difficult to be perceived clearly.

Deformities

The second sub-category of physical characteristics is deformities. Deformity is defined as "a permanent structural deviation from the normal shape, size, or alignment, resulting in disfigurement; it may be congenital or acquired" (The Free Dictionary). Our data of this type include 27 names that describe impairments in the person named whether directly or indirectly. The data also show high incidence of the use of nicknames that describe the nicknamees' defects or handicaps.

For examples, the nickname *liṭram* (Cf. Wardat 1997:48) 'the-deaf-one' is given to two persons who suffer from hearing loss and *lixras* Cf. Wardat: *ibid* 'the-dumb-one' is given to two persons who have speech loss. *gartuum* 'cut-off' is an example of a nickname given to two persons: one has cut off fingers, the other has cut off toe. On the other hand, a person who has lost his ear is nicknamed *ligṭaš*, a word usually used to describe an animal with a broken ear. *liṭma* 'the blind (one)' is an example of a nickname given to four persons attached to their first names. *maḥmuud liṭma* and *ṣoodih liṭma* both are blind while *gaasim liṭma*, a nickname given to two different people with the same first name *gaasim* who suffer from weak sight but who are not completely blind.

Ugliness in our data is the reason of nine offensive nicknames. *iš-šini* 'the ugly (one)' is a nickname of a person who has a wrinkled face, *il-wiṣir* 'the bumpy (one)' and *limhaššam* 'the smashed (one)' both have scars in the face. *kaṣbuul* 'the rounded (one)', *šakkuul* 'the shaped (one)', *ṣali čaṣmal* and *ṣabčal* (whose literal meanings are not known as far as I could tell) all of whom have pimples in their faces. *zgm in-naagah* 'the mouth of the camel' has a long nose and deformed mouth, and *lizḡeebi* 'the-one-with-downs' has a hairy face.

People could be nicknamed based on their colors. dark skin is given to four persons: *ṣajwah* 'dates', *il ṣabdih* 'the slave', *siwaar iḏ-ḏ ahab* 'the name of a Sudanese president', and *xneefsih* 'beetle'. Light color is also involved in nicknaming; a person who has an extremely white skin is given the nickname *iš-šihin* 'the white sand'. Other skin colors, on the other hand, are given directly. For example, *liṣfar* 'the yellow (one)' is given to a person with pale skin. *ṣabdallah liḥmar* 'Abduallah, the red (one)' and *il-ḥummri* 'the red (one)' are nicknames given to two persons with red skin, *il-fisfoori* 'the shining (one)' is given to a person with multi-colored skin.

Some nicknames could also describe leg impairment as a deviation of the normal way of walking. For example, a person who has a bended leg caused by car accident was nicknamed *lifčah* 'the lame (one)'. His injured leg became shorter than the other. Another person who has leg impairment was nicknamed *ḡabu ṣarraaj* 'the one with limp'. *lifčah* and *ḡabu ṣarraaj* were also observed in Wardat (1997: 48).

A person who has a crooked neck is nicknamed *liṭwaaji* 'the crooked (one)', and another person is nicknamed *ḡabu irgeebih* 'the one with a neck'(diminutive). But the nickname is used ironically: the nicknameee looks as though he has no neck; his head is seemingly attached directly to his body.

Psychological and behavioral traits

Nicknames may describe how people think and behave. Offensive nicknames represent only negative traits that are socially rejected or criticized such as lying, stealing, cheating, miserliness, anger, and carelessness. In addition, mental disorder is included in this category since it affects behavior and psychology. The collected nicknames of this type are 36 out of 181 names.

In our data, lying is the source of different nicknames. For example, a person who lies too much is nicknamed *ič-čirbaal*. He is likened to a tool used to separate grains from undesired little things mixed with them, such as small stones or dirt. The wide openings allowing big amounts of grains to pass through it. Excessive lying is also likened to *il-babbuur* 'a big old wheat mill' since it works constantly and grinds big amounts of wheat. Another person was nicknamed *iṭ-ṭayyaar* 'the pilot'; he was telling his colleagues in the army untrue lies about being a pilot. *ḡabu hanṭaš maḏṣah*, and *ḡabu limraṭ* are other examples of nicknames related to lying but their literal meanings are unknown as far as I could tell. The relationship between the latter nicknames and the personal trait is not clear.

Stealing is another bad trait comprising a source of nicknames. For example, *ḡabu ij-jaaj* 'the one of the chickens' stole chickens; *sarraag il-miṣjan* 'the thief of the putty' once stole a putty; and *ḡabu il-gištah* 'the one of the cream' stole a can of cream. An individual who deceives people for stealing their money has two nicknames. *ṭaš-ṭaš* and *id-daktoor*. He was first nicknamed *ṭaš-ṭaš* because he steals people's money (but it has unknown literal meaning as far as I could tell). In one of his robberies, he

disguised as a doctor, so people gave him another nickname, *id-daktoor* 'the professor'. He is likened to the professor to assert that he is professional in stealing.

Being irritable is the reason of the nicknames *ʔabu ǧaḏab* 'the one of anger' and *ʔabu ʕaṣab* 'the one of a nerve'. The nicknames show a tendency to be easily annoyed. On the other hand, a woman who irritates others is nicknamed *mǧiḏah* 'the annoying (one)'. Another annoying person is nicknamed *il-ʔafa*, which has no literal meaning known as far as I could tell.

Miserliness, in our data, is given three nicknames, *ʔabu ḥafnih* 'the one of handful' is likened to a person holding small quantity in his hand. *il-maḥḥi* 'the one of nothing' is likened to a person who is almost have nothing (though he is a rich man). *il-maiytil* 'the dead (one) (fem.)' is likened to a dead body that would never give anything.

Showing cunning and deceitful nature is given two nicknames: *is-saḥir* 'the magician' and *iṣ-ṣalṣil* (which has no literal meaning known) because they can delude and convince others by their speech. On the other hand, a sucker who is easily deceived is nicknamed *ʔabu samaha* 'the one of forgiveness'.

Being reckless and stubborn are another reason for nicknaming. *lizʕar* 'the yob' (which is the nickname of two persons) and *lihmeeli* 'the carless' are nicknames of three different persons who are careless and irresponsible for their actions. *il-ʕijil* 'the calf' and *id-dirxil* (no meaning is known for this nickname) are nicknames of two different persons who are hard-minded i.e. hard to deal with.

Some nicknames in our data include traits of men that are assigned to women. A man-like woman is referred to with nicknames such as *beeka* 'the officer' and *umm xaṣwah* 'the one with testis' that are associated with masculine features or traits.

Some nicknames of this type are used ironically. For example, *il-ǧaḥam* 'the one who accepts the others' is a nickname given ironically to an arrogant man who doesn't accept other people. *ʕeeṣih ij-jarba* is given ironically to an arrogant woman. The nickname is poor; therefore; she is likened to a famous and rich Saudi family (in the villagers' perception, arrogance is restricted to rich people). The nickname *il-ḥajji* 'the pilgrim' refers to a pious, but the nickname doesn't pray or even being to a mosque. The nickname *il-ʕiid* 'the colonel' is usually refers to a person who is in charge in giving orders in the army, but the nickname is not a colonel; he has a genetic disorder (Down syndrome) and intellectual disability.

Our examples include nicknames that given to persons suffering from mental disorders, different conditions leading to one's inability to function properly. For example, the nickname *ibrahim il-habilih* 'Ibrahim, the dim-witted (one)' refers to an imbecile who tells incoherent stories, talks about dead people, and enters homes surreptitiously looking for food or rest. *ǧaazi in-ninih* 'Ghazi, the little-minded (one)' refers to another person who walks daily in the same direction to the same destination with a small radio put to his ear. He also walks oddly and does not comb his hair. *il-ʕagiid* 'the colonel', as mentioned above, suffers from a genetic disorder known as *Down syndrome*; He has physical as well as mental growth delay.

ṭah- ṭah is also weird; he follows young girls and makes passes on them. He also has a bended head and unpleasant face. *drinnih* is a nickname of insane woman ; she makes fires wherever she found some trash without paying attention if the trash is near a tree, house, or any prohibited area. *buxxu* is another mad woman who has popeyed eyes; she runs after children and frightens them. The nicknames *ṭah- ṭah*, *drinnih*, and *buxxu* have no clear literal meanings as far as I could tell. People may use meaningless nicknames to ridicule of their mental illness.

As shown above, the nicknames of mental disorders also involve physical defects or features. This type of people have some characteristics in common; they spend their time wandering in the streets in ragged clothes and weird looks. Therefore, the public employ these people's nicknames in scary stories to frighten their children if they committed mistakes or refused to go to bed on time.

Occupation

The profession that one used to do the whole of his life, later may replace his name and then it becomes part of his identity. The collected nicknames of this type are 8 names out of 181.

Most of the nicknames of this type related to food. For example, *ʔabu iṣ-ṣaʕir* 'the one of barely' is a nickname of a person who used to sell barely; *ʔabu il-ʕajin* 'the one of the dough' was a baker; *ʔabu ij-jaaj* 'the one of chickens' used to sell chickens, and *drubs* '(candy) drops' sold candy; *maṣṣiis* 'thread' was the only merchant selling thick threads in his store in that village. The nickname *ʕaṣfuur* 'bird' owns a mini market in his village; he was nicknamed after a famous super market in the city. *il-*

mag seems to come from the English word *Mack* which is a kind of trucks and the nickname was as a driver of a Mack. *ḥakiim iṭ-ṭawašaāt* 'the doctor of impotence' is a nickname of a person who treated men suffering from impotence.

Habits and Interests

Nicknames may represent activities that people used to do in their daily lives and it became part of their identities. The collected nicknames of this source were 28 names out of 181. The majority of the collected examples from this type refer to eating habits in addition to different habits, activities and interests that became part of people's daily lifestyle.

Our data show a notable use of nicknames related to food preference and habits, and it is the source of thirteen names. For example, *il-xiəriyyih* is also known as *umm il-xiəri* because she likes eating yoghurt, one name of which is *xaaḥir* which shares the root of the two nicknames. *ʔabu ir-ruus* 'that of the heads' likes cooking and eating heads of goats and cows. Both *ʔabu id-dibis* 'that of the molasses' and *ʔabu daabis* 'that of the molasses' like eating molasses. *il-giigi* 'the locust' ate a kind of locust called *giig*. *ʔabu iṭ-ṭabiix*, *ʔabu ij-jaaj*, *ʔabu likbaab*, *burğul*, and *ʕajwa* are nicknames of persons who like cooked food, chicken, kbab (a dish made from bulgar and other ingredients), groats, and dates, respectively. *ʔabu ʕaṭaš* 'that one of thirst' is a nickname of a person who is always thirsty and he drinks large amounts of water. Irony is also involved in this type of nickname. For example, *ʔabu il-ʕadas* 'the one of lentils' is nicknamed by the kind of food he hates. Foreign words can be used to describe drinking habits. For example, *is-sik* (originally an English word, *sic* [lit. 'as is],) refers to a person who drinks unmixed alcoholic drinks.

Nicknames in our data also describe different habits and interests that remain to the entire lifetime of the nicknames, even after death. For example, *faaris ʔabu ičlaab* 'Faris, the one of dogs' used to take care of dogs. *il-abjar* (the name of a horse) was nicknamed also after the horse he owned. *ḡabʕ il-majannah* 'the cemetery's hyena' used to sleep in the cemetery; he is likened to hyena that is not afraid of graves or darkness. All of these nicknames are dead; however, they are still known with their nicknames.

It has been found that some nicknames may describe habits that were limited to certain points of the nicknames' lives. For example, *iz-zaʕʕaag* 'the screamer' used to scream a lot as a child; *il-ʕijil* 'the calf' used to bang his head against the chalkboard, something calves usually do; *gaḥmaš* laughed a lot till his cheeks got red (the root of this word relates to laugh so much as to lose control, and to getting crunchy as result of being toasted); *il-giriš* 'the piaster' cried to get a piaster; *maradoona* played soccer with boys when she was a little girl who was good in this game so she was nicknamed after the famous soccer player. These nicknames had these habits only in their childhood but their nicknames remained with them into their later days.

In addition, some people were nicknamed in their adulthood. For example, *id-dimšig* 'the one from Damascus' is a nickname of a person who frequently travelled to Damascus; *il-mitraṭib* 'the wet' took too much showers; and *iṭ-ṭayyaar* 'the flyer' used to drive his truck at high speed.

In addition, some of these nicknames refer to habits which remained with the nicknames for a good part of their lives. For example, *il-ʕaṣfuuriyyih* (Cf. Wardat 1997:48) 'the bird-like (one)' is a nickname of a woman who was obsessed with cleanliness. Being inactive and sluggish is the reason of three nicknames: *il-gaʕuud* 'the camel', *ij-jahlaan* (Wardat 1997:48) 'the ignorant', and *jaʕfiinih* (which has unknown literal meaning as far as I could tell). The relationship between the nickname and the personal trait is not clear.

Nicknames may be names of the objects the nicknames used to carry with them. For example, a person who used to take a jug when he goes to the rest room is nicknamed *ʔabu ibriig* 'the one of a jug'. Another person who used to carry a bucket is nicknamed *ʔabu dalo* 'the one of a bucket'. *ʔabu šaakuuš* 'the one of a hammer used to hold a hammer and used it in repairing broken objects.

Events and Circumstances

Like names, nicknames may be influenced by events and circumstances. The collected nicknames of this type are 14 names out of 181. In our data, such nicknames are related to birth conditions, orphanhood, and passing events and utterances.

Our data include nicknames related to birth circumstances. For example, *iš-šooli* 'the camel' is a person who was born big and healthy and thus he was likened a camel in its seven months of age. On the other hand, a person who was born tiny and weak was nicknamed *il-keelo* 'the kilogram'. *šeebaan* 'grey-haired' had white hair the moment he was born and *il-ʕaaši* 'the stuck(one)' had difficulties in his birth.

Orphanhood is another reason for nicknaming. The data obtained reveal that the use of the mother's name with first name instead of father's name is very common for those whose fathers are dead or separated from these mothers. For example, *gaasim il-^ʕeeših* 'Gasim, Aishah's son' and *gaasim iz-zahur* 'Gasim, Zahor's son' are fatherless through divorce; Aishah and Zahor are their mothers. However, *ʕali il-^ʕiidih* 'Ali, Aidih's son' and *imhammad il-^ʕoofah* 'Mohammed, Awfah's son' are fatherless through death. On the other hand, a motherless person is nicknamed *ʔabu il-bagar* 'that of the cows' since he suckled of a cow.

Our examples include nicknames related to certain events in their bearers' lives. For example, *il-kasiih* 'the lame (one)' suffered from walking disability as a child. *ʔabu diyyih* 'the one of blood-money' is nicknamed so because he once paid blood money instead of a member of his tribe who unintentional murdered someone. The nickname *il-baʔal* 'the hero' has a positive meaning but it is used ironically: the nickname involved his friends in difficult situation during a trip. He advised them to camp in certain place but it was unsafe one and they were attacked by robbers.

Our examples represent a remarkable source of nicknames. It includes passing utterances that the nicknames once said and thus became part of their identities. Interestingly, even an incidental word one may utter, would sign his nickname. For example, the nickname *ʕalʕam* mistakenly read the abbreviation *ʕalʕam* (صلعم) which is an acronym for *ʕalla llahu ʕalaa muhammad* 'Peace Be Upon Mohammed' as *ʕalʕam* thinking it is a word. The acronym is usually read in full though written shortened. Other person who once said *hajar raʔul* 'heavy stone' was nicknamed by this phrase. This shows that nickname innovation and nickname giving is an inexhaustible process.

Findings

One can see from the above exposition that the same person could have more than one nickname for different reasons. For example, *garguudih* and *zagh in-naagah* are two different offensive nicknames that represent two different characteristics of the same bearer: thinness and ugliness, respectively. In addition, a person would have more than one nickname for the same reason. For example, *iḥmad il-xafiif* 'Ahmad, the tiny (one)' and *iz-zagadih* 'a small marble' are two offensive nicknames of the same bearer and both nicknames confirm the same characteristic of the nickname (smallness). An interesting case is that of a person called in three different ways. However, all three names are related: *il-^ʕijil* 'the calf' is one of them due to a habit the nickname had as a child; he used to bang his head against the chalkboard, something calves usually do. *ʕijil-dallih* 'Dallih's calf' associates this man with his wife's nickname. *ḥasan id-dallih* 'Dallih's Hasan' is a combination of his first name and his wife's nickname. The latter give Hasan a status of subservience to his wife.

In some cases, it has been found that the same nickname can be given for more than one nickname for the same reason. For example, the nickname *lizʕar* 'the yob' is assigned to two persons since both are careless and irresponsible for their actions. In addition, one nickname may be given to more than one person but each indicates different things. For example, *ʔabu ij-jaaj* 'that of the chickens' is a nickname that refers to three persons: a person who likes eating chickens, a person who steals chickens, and a person who sells chickens.

In addition, our data show that one characteristic or feature could be the reason for more than one nickname. For example, leg-impairment is the reason of two nicknames, stealing is the reason of three nicknames, dark skin is the reason of four nicknames, mental disorder is the source of six nicknames, smallness is exemplified with seven nicknames, and ugliness is the source of nine nicknames.

In addition, it has been found that some of the nicknames are alive and some others are dead. This point reveals that the nicknames are still known by their offensive nicknames even after death. A nickname would die, but his/her offensive nickname outlives him/her.

The collected data show that the literal meaning of offensive nicknames may refer directly, indirectly, or even ironically to their intentional meanings. A dumb person, for example, can be nicknamed *lixras* 'the dumb (one)'. However, when a black woman is nicknamed *il-ʕabdih* 'the slave', a figure of speech is involved. In other cases, however, the literal meaning of a nickname is completely different from or opposite of its intentional meaning. For example, *il-ḥajji* 'the-pilgrim (i.e. the pious one)' is a nickname given ironically to a person who has never prayed or been to a mosque. Thus, irony is a major theme in the use of offensive nicknames and it means saying something and meaning something different or even the opposite.

The literal meanings of the indirect offensive nicknames in our data are derived from different sources. They may be related to animals such as *il-kabiš* (the ram), food such as *ʔabu il-ʕadas* 'the one of lentils', devices, materials and tools such as *ʔabu šakuuš* 'the one of a hammer'. They may be related to famous characters' names such as *ḡawwaar* (after a famous Syrian TV character).

In addition, the literal meaning of indirect offensive nicknames could be foreign words such as *is-suubar* (the super), incidental utterances such as *jlaaṭah* 'mud'(given to someone who once said *jlaaṭah*, or even meaningless words such as *ṭah- ṭah*).

The researcher found no literal meaning of some nicknames; the participants use some nicknames for specific reasons but they ignore their literal meanings. The researcher searched for the meaning of these nicknames in the Internet and dictionaries. She found the meaning of some nicknames such as *iš-šooli* (the camel at the age of seven months), and *il-giigi* (comes from *giig*, a kind of locust). However, she found no meaning of some other nicknames though they are used for specific reasons.

The present researcher found that though some offensive nicknames are common, people use them without knowing the reasons of naming. Generally, such nicknames may have literal meanings. However, their meanings are not always the same of their reason of naming; some nicknames could be used figuratively or ironically as shown in some examples above. Therefore, she suggested such nicknames to be grouped in a separate category. (See the table below).

Table 2: Nicknames with unknown source

No.	Nicknames with literal meaning
1	<i>il-ḥadiidi</i> 'the iron (one).
2	<i>id-dušš</i> 'the shower'.
3	<i>lidweeri</i> 'the sparrow'.
4	<i>ličḥal</i> 'the one who is darkened with kohl'.
5	<i>ḥabu isneenih</i> 'the one with tooth (diminutive)'.
6	<i>šmaaṭ</i> 'diaper rash'.
7	<i>šiiḥ</i> 'wormwood'.

In addition, she found that some offensive nicknames are common and used among the participants. However, these names have unknown meaning and reasons of naming as well. They may have possible meaning in other dialects. (See the table below).

Table 3: nicknames with unknown meaning and sources

No.	Nicknames with unknown meaning and sources
8	<i>migṣiṭ</i>
9	<i>deedis</i>
10	<i>il-galḥuuṭ</i>
11	<i>di^f bis</i>
12	<i>ij-jaṭiimi</i>
13	<i>iz-zakkaar</i>
14	<i>iz-zuḡut</i>

15	<i>il-gee^ʕiş</i>
16	<i>il-başrak</i>
17	<i>iş-şarhiidi</i>
18	<i>iş-şarhuuli</i>
19	<i>iṭ-ṭaxşuun</i>
20	<i>il-buṭḥi</i>

Conclusion

The present study has investigated offensive nicknaming in Jordanian Arabic as spoken in the Horan district in the north of the country. These nicknames are associated with the nicknamees' body features and deformities or unpleasant psychological and behavioral traits, or sensitive situations and events in the nicknamees' lifetimes.

Based on the discussion of this study, the present researcher comes up with the following facts:

- a. Nicknaming is a descriptive process (Noble, 1976; Wilson, 1998; Turner, 2001; Potter, 2007 among others); it describes a people's physical features and deformities, psychological and behavioral traits, professions, habits, events, and utterances.
- b. The same feature/trait could be the reason for more than one nickname. In the present study, one characteristic (namely, ugliness) is given nine nicknames, out
- c. Nicknames could have direct, metaphorical, or ironical relationship to the nicknamees.

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Appendix A

The source of the nickname	The nickname	No

Appendix B

The Questionnaire in English

Personal information:

Gender: Age: Profession: Educational level:

Questions:

- 1- Mention the offensive nicknames used in your village and their reasons?
 - 1-
 - 2-
 - 3-
 - 4-