## Zwartje, Flight of Delight and Chikai Borrowed Names for Animals in Sweden

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#### **Abstract:**

This paper deals, from a Swedish point of view, with names for domestic animals that have been borrowed from other language areas and other cultures during the last two or three centuries. There are several different reasons for animals having or being given foreign names. These include imported animals being allowed to keep their original names; a desire to reflect an animal's origin or descent; a wish to praise the animal (or enhance its status) by giving it a name from a high-status language; a taste for the exotic; and a concern to give an animal a unique name. Similarities and differences between the naming of different species of agricultural livestock and household pets are discussed, and an attempt is made to explain why certain of these naming practices have become common in today's society.

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#### 1. Introduction

One of the many pleasant things in life is, in my opinion, to be a name-giver, to feel that one can endow someone or something with a unique reference marker, i.e., a name. When naming one's child, this naming procedure can be very complicated, as there are of course lots of traditions and cultural habits and also legislation that may restrict the parents' choice. In the case of naming domestic animals, especially pets, the procedure can be simpler, although it can also give rise to many questions. And the decision as to which name actually to choose still has to be made.

In this paper, my aim is to discuss the custom of giving domestic animals, farm livestock as well as pets, names that are borrowed from foreign languages or cultures. I will analyse and discuss several reasons for animals having or being given foreign or borrowed names, and I will also dwell a little on the subject of different onomastica for different animal species. My examples are taken from names of animals in Sweden.

## 2. Horses and cattle

## 2.1. Horses of old and of today

Already in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many horses in Sweden were given non-Swedish names. These horses were of course not farm animals, but were often war horses or belonged to the royal stables. Their names were often French, reflecting the fact that French was the fashionable and high-status language of the time. Some examples from this period are *Aimable, Brillant, Généreux, Marechal* and *Mouton* (Karlsson 1983).

In today's Sweden, very few military or farm horses are to be found. Nevertheless, the total horse population has increased during the last two decades to reach the same level as in the 1950s (www.sjv.se). This increase is of course related to the fact that horse riding is now one of the largest sports in Sweden and that horse racing is a favourite pastime. Large-scale organized horse breeding has led to specific rules on name-giving for several breeds. Some stud books give detailed instructions as to what kinds of name should be given to a foal, and there is also a tradition of giving certain names to specific breeds, often reflecting the breed's country of origin.

A very good example of this is the case of the Icelandic horse. This is a rather unique breed, a very strong and primitive horse of pony size that easily carries grown men, and that has become popular in many European countries. It has been bred in Iceland for the last thousand years and has retained two special gaits mostly lacking in modern horse breeds. No Icelandic horse that has left Iceland is ever allowed to return to the island, and thus many horses are exported with their Icelandic names. Icelandic horses that are born in other countries are also given Icelandic names – the international Icelandic horse organization (FEIF), which is in charge of the international stud book WorldFengur, states that the name and origin of a horse of this breed should be 'in accordance with Icelandic name-giving tradition' (www.icelandichorse.se, WorldFengur, rule 2.21).

Some examples of horse names popular on Iceland are *Hrímfaxi*, *Grani*, *Glaður*, *Nótt*, *Flekkur*, *Hrafn*, *Stjarna*, *Bleikur* and *Rauðhetta* (Pálsson 1995). Semantically, many of the names are descriptive (either directly or metaphorically) or are loans from Old Norse mythology, but many horses are also given personal names.

What about the names of Icelandic horses in Sweden? Icelandic names can be quite difficult for Swedes to spell and pronounce, as the languages have drifted far apart despite their common ancestry. The Icelandic alphabet also has some letters not used in Swedish (ð, þ, æ, and accents on long vowels). According to the largest animal insurance company in Sweden, Agria, the most popular names for Icelandic horses are, in descending order: Embla, Dimma, Vinur, Frenja, Katla, Saga, Tindra, Askur, Gandur and Perla (www.agria.se). All names are gender-marked, with female names ending in -a and male names in -ur. Three of the female names are identical with (or used as) popular names for newborn girls in Sweden – Embla, Saga and Tindra (www.scb.se). In none of these popular names do we find any of the special Icelandic letters or diacritic signs that can be found in the names of indigenous horses. Maybe one could use the term 'Icelandic lite' for the Swedish-Icelandic horse onomasticon? Interestingly, the names Askur and Embla seem to be popular for first-born foals. According to Snorri's Edda, these were the names of the first two humans. The old mythology is still valid as a source of inspiration for names for humans and also for horses, it would seem.

Another foreign horse breed gaining popularity in Sweden is the Bashkir horse, originating from Bashkortostan, in the southern Ural Mountains. The most popular names for them are mostly Russian-sounding, but none is too complicated to pronounce for a Swede: *Nikita, Anastasia, Karga, Dimitri* and *Jigarov*. On the website of the Swedish Bashkir Horse Association (www.basjkir.se), one notices that several of the mares have names ending in *-ja* (*Ninja, Dimja, Nastja*), which makes them sound Russian or Slavonic to Swedish ears. So we have a 'Russian lite' onomasticon, as well as an 'Icelandic lite' one.

Here I would like to draw a parallel with the Italian-sounding trademarks for food products discussed by Marie Rieger (forthcoming), with real Italian words sometimes being perceived as non-Italian by German customers. It is perhaps the conception of what sounds a certain foreign language contains, rather than real words or indeed names, that provides the proper local colour for people with little knowledge of the intended language.

### 2.2. Cattle

In the traditional Scandinavian cattle onomastic, a large share of the names was descriptive, as the animals differed greatly in size, colouring and marking. A white hornless cow with small black spots could be given many names emanating from those traits (e.g., Svana, Kulla, Krusgås etc.). Most other cow names contained laudatory elements and very few were identical to personal names (Leibring 2000, passim). Bulls and oxen, though, would sometimes receive names created as ordinary two-stemmed Swedish family names or soldier names. Thus, even our professors of onomastics, like Strandberg and Moberg, had earlier namesakes in the country's barns.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when organized cattle breeding began, many cows and bulls were imported from the Netherlands and from Britain. These animals, expensive and highly valued by their new owners, were allowed to keep their foreign names, and thus many new cow

names were soon to be found in Swedish cowsheds. Some examples from Dutch are *De Jong*, Kootstra, Melkbron and Zwartje. It also became customary to give heifers the same name as their mother, so some of these names continued to be used on Swedish farms to the present

Names from England also came into use in Swedish barns in the late 1800s. In the stud books we find English women's names as well as traditional English cow names, such as Cherry, Dainty, Lovely, Countess, Buttermilk and Honeysuckle, though not the immortal names from the novel Cold Comfort Farm (Feckless, Aimless and Pointless, Gibbons 1932). The names Dainty, etc. would be recycled for many bovine generations in Sweden and could later appear in garbled forms, such as *Hunesack* from *Honeysuckle*. From my own childhood, I remember a beautiful and docile black Aberdeen Angus cow named what I thought was Eltiburi, a name I only as a name scholar realized was a misrepresentation of the popular English cow name *Elderberry* – a very suitable name for a black cow, of course.

A new name-giving principle in the late 1800s, in part inspired by the names of imported foreign cattle, was the regular use of women's names for cows (Leibring 2000, ch. X). Today, this is the most common name category for cows, if they are in fact given individual names at all. Most cows nowadays will only have a stud book number, possibly followed by the name of some early ancestress, as a sort of family name. An exception is made for breeding bulls, which are usually given individual names, many of them men's names and names borrowed from the worlds of literature or popular culture. Some examples from the late 1990s are Nelson, Nimrod, Simson, Desmond, Oliver, Nero, Nigel, Nastase and Nixon (www.svhs.se).

## 3. Pet animals: dogs and cats

In many modern homes there is at least one pet, perhaps several, which usually have their own individual name. Here I will discuss similarities and differences in the use of foreign name elements for three popular species: dogs, cats and rabbits.

## 3.1. Dogs

Close your eyes and listen to the sounds in any park where children and dogs are playing are the names being called out those of the dogs or the children? Nowadays, it can be quite hard to tell, as dogs and children will often have identical names (Mattisson 1999, Othén 2008, Leibring 2002). Among the most popular dog names in Sweden are Ronja, Molly, Wilma, Fanny, Tindra and Alice, all of them also very popular girls' names during the last decade. I would stress the girl element here, as for male dogs there seems to exist a more permanent dog onomasticon, with the names Bamse, Ludde, Charlie, Zorro and Rocky on top for the dog population as a whole, none of them used as regular boys' names in Sweden, though some are borrowed from popular culture.

Among individual dog breeds we find greater name differences, and for several breeds of foreign origin more exotic names are in use. Dogs of the Finnish Spitz breed are often given names that are Finnish in type, e.g., Mikko, Rikko, Raja, Sappo, Mirja and Kessu, some identical to Finnish personal names, and all quite easy for a Swede to pronounce.

An even more exotic dog is the Japanese Shiba Inu. These dogs may for example be given Japanese-inspired names such as Chikai, Kenzo, Ninja, Suki and Sumo (www.shibainfo.com). If we analyse these dogs' full names (including the breeder's name), the Japanese influence shows even more clearly. The breeding house Amateraso has given two of its dogs the magnificent names Amateraso no Inari and Amateraso no Iha-Naga. And the dog Chikai just mentioned has the full name JBAX Chikai-Yorokobi.

So, popular first names of girls, figures from the popular culture and words from the dog's country of origin are among the major sources of name inspiration for dog owners, apart from names from the more specific dog onomasticon. A rather interesting phenomenon is that even first names that are totally out of fashion for children (i.e. names popular in the 1940s and 1950s) are now used for dogs, thereby possibly preparing the ground for them to be used for children in a couple of decades.

#### 3.2. Cats

'The naming of cats is a difficult matter', as we and T. S. Eliot know, and their names are not cast in the same mould as dog names. Cat names cover an even broader field, at least in theory, with many complex names borrowed from literature and history. Part of the reason may be that it is harder to make cats listen to their name – they are more responsive to the rattle of a spoon in a tin of food – which may mean that cats' names do not have to be as easily pronounced as those of dogs. Of course, cats often have hypocoristic nicknames as well as longer, more exotic full names. From the Agria records, we find that the most popular cat names in Sweden are mostly personal names or names belonging to a well-established cat onomasticon. The ten most popular names are *Maja*, *Nisse*, *Smulan*, *Simba*, *Tiger*, *Lisa*, *Findus*, *Sigge*, *Missan* and *Selma*.

In this onomasticon, we find some personal names, but a larger number of traditional cat names, including literary names – several literary cats, Swedish and foreign, have bestowed their names on many real ones. Among the more exotic cat breeds, one notices examples of names referring to the origins of the breed concerned. Among the Abyssinian cats, which are said to look like the cats pictured in the Egyptian pyramids, there are several that have Egyptian-sounding names: *Ramses*, *Cleopatra*, *Isis* and *Anubis*. But my impression is that the influence of the breed and its origins on naming is greater among dog owners than among cat owners, and that the proportion of borrowed names is smaller for cats than for dogs.

## 4. Show jumping rabbits

The last animal species I wish to discuss is pet rabbits, and not just any pet rabbit nibbling on a carrot in a hutch, but show jumping rabbits. In Scandinavia, rabbit hopping or rabbit show jumping (there is no established English term yet) has become a popular hobby in recent decades, especially among young girls. The rabbits are trained to jump over different types of obstacles, rather like those used for show jumping horses. There are competitions, both indoors and outdoors, all over Scandinavia. The world high-jump record is 99.5 cm and the long-jump record 3 metres, both held by Danish rabbits (www.skhrf.com).

These show jumping rabbits are presented under very handsome and impressive-sounding names, similar to dogs' breeding names. The rabbit breeder will apply for a specific farm name to be registered at the Swedish Rabbit Jumping Federation (Sveriges Kaninhoppares Riksförbund), like a kennel name, which then forms the first part of what one could call the rabbit's full name or register name. Examples are: *Grenens Flight of Delight, Vallmons Chance to Impress* and *Grenens Fight for Fun of Jasmine*, with *Grenens* and *Vallmons* as the respective farm names. English is a popular base for individual name-giving, as these names show. Most of the rabbits have a shorter name as well, used when talking to or about them. These names may be popular or international children's names, like *Dexter, Elliott* or *Tindra*, but they can also belong to the rabbit onomasticon – *Stampe, Skutt, Sotis*, etc.



The rabbit Dexter

In the Swedish Rabbit Jumping Federation's computerized files, over six thousand rabbits are registered with names (www.skhrf.se/Reg.xls). These names of course vary a great deal, but the strong English influence is very striking. From other languages, we find a few French and some Spanish names, but apart from names that are either personal names, made up from Swedish words or part of the rabbit onomasticon, many consist of positive or commendatory English words. The English dominance is not very surprising, as many (perhaps most) of the rabbit breeders are young girls, whose first and often only foreign language is English, and who regard English as a high-status language.

## 5. Why give foreign names?

So – why give your animal a foreign name? Several reasons can be identified, and these can be grouped under three main headings:

The first kind of reason is a wish to preserve or draw attention to the origin of the animal. This can be done by

- a) letting an imported animal keep its original name, which is then inherited by the next generation common among imported cows in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or
- b) choosing new names from the language of the country of origin, very typical for Icelandic horses and some exotic dog breeds.

The second is a wish to praise the animal – or maybe its owner – which you can do by giving it a name from a high-status language. This fashion is common for all animals, not least for show jumping rabbits.

The third type of reason is a concern to give the animal a unique name – sometimes necessary if two animals are not allowed to have the same name (as with racehorses, for example) and the inspiration for names has to be found far away.

A factor that can play a role in all these groups is if the name-giver has a taste for the exotic or dreams about foreign places, as this may also be expressed in his or her choice of animal name.

#### 6. Different zoonomastica

In the overall zoonomasticon in Sweden, many smaller subgroups can be identified, and in some of these the foreign element predominates. It must not be forgotten, though, that many animals are given Swedish names or names that have to be seen as international. It is hard to distinguish between international names and names borrowed from foreign languages, and no clear dividing lines can be drawn. Nevertheless, I have tentatively tried, on what I very broadly call semantic grounds, to categorize borrowed names into four major groups, i. e.:

- a) names from foreign zoonomastica quite common for imported cattle breeds and some horse breeds.
- b) laudatory or positive appellatives or adjectives from other languages can be found among all types of animals, not least pet animals,
- c) foreign place-names or personal names, frequent in all animals investigated, especially the personal names,
- d) names of well-known individuals, either fictitious or real from films, literature, theatre, comics, music, politics, etc. This is perhaps the most commonly used category of non-native names, and it is debatable whether this group is in fact to be classified as foreign or as international.

#### 7. Conclusions

If an animal species has been kept by humans for a long time for the same function, an onomasticon has usually developed. These onomastica can change over time, the Swedish cow onomasticon being a good example of this. For some animal species or breeds, the foreign element is more striking than for others, for reasons that I have tried to illustrate.

Many animals nowadays will be given personal names, and there is an interaction between popular baby names and popular pet names, especially for females (humans and animals). But many animals will receive names that are borrowed or formed from non-native languages, especially if this language has a perceived high status.

These borrowed names still sometimes have to be adapted to Swedish spelling or pronunciation, and not all foreign words or names will or can be used. A name that is meant to be spoken must not be too hard on the tongue – that is a rule that also applies to animal names.

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