

Some Linguistic Aspects of the Term “Statistics”

Subjects: [Linguistics](#)

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The origin of the word “Statistics” is mistakenly sought in the Latin word “Status”. Although the term is indeed etymologically linked to “Status”, it is derived from the Greek noun “Στατός” (statos), meaning standing.

history of statistics

origin of statistics

etymology of statistics

Achenwal

Pawitan and Lee start their recent article on “*The philosophy of statistics*” with the phrase, «Deep down, we are all interested in truth» ^[1] (p. 41). Reading this sentence, I wondered what we know about the history of the word “Statistics”? What does it mean? What is its etymological origin?

A word cannot be isolated from its historical background. The need for a new word is scientifically determined, and its history is, partly, a matter of etymology. Through the science of Etymology, the study of the origin of words and how their meanings have evolved, we understand the history, i.e., the origin and evolution of each scientific term. The same happens with the term “Statistics”.

The etymology of statistical terms provides us with valuable insights into the history and development of statistical concepts, highlighting their origins, evolution, and connections to other fields. This understanding enriches our appreciation of Statistics as a discipline and enhances our ability to apply various statistical methods accurately and efficiently.

Referring to historical sources, we can trace the development of the fundamental concept of the term “Statistics”. In all sources, from the most prestigious dictionary of the English language, the *Oxford English Dictionary* ^[2], to the most popular ones like Wikipedia ^[3], and from the oldest ^[4] to the most recent ^[5], we will read that the word “Statistics” comes from the new Latin word “statisticum collegium” (“council of state”) and the Italian word “statista” (“politician” or “states-man”), reflecting its origins in state governance and population data collection.

The question that arises is, since “Statistics” is a process of counting, presenting, and analyzing data, why was it connected to the “state” of “state governance” and not to “governance”? “State” is a very general concept, while “governance” is an administrative process. “State” needs “governance” to function. “Governance” is what needs Statistics to govern the “state” effectively.

References

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