

Sociolinguistic Studies

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Dis/continuity in the representation of gender in names across cultures

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Sociolinguistic Studies is the new title of *Estudios de Sociolingüística*, an international journal founded in 2000 at the University of Vigo (Galicia, Spain), which offers a linguistic and cultural bridge between sociolinguistic research in the Romance world-especially the Spanish and Latino-American world-and the English-speaking research community.

All articles in *Sociolinguistic Studies* are peer-reviewed and may be in English, Spanish, Galician, Portuguese, French, or Italian (90% of the contents are in English). It takes an ecumenical approach to the different schools, methodological principles or research orientations within sociolinguistic research, and also accepts contributions from related fields such as pragmatics, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, interactional linguistics, language acquisition and socialization, linguistic anthropology, ethnomethodology, and the ethnography of communication. Papers may examine any issue in sociolinguistic research, including, but not limited to, styles and registers, communicative situations and speech events, politeness, bilingual conversation and code-switching, gender and discourse, language attitudes, language ideologies, the diversity of the worldwide linguistic situation, bilingualism and multilingualism, diglossia, pidgins and creoles, language and culture, and language and identity.

The *bilingual turn* (to which the University of Vigo has contributed by holding two international symposia, in 1997 and 2002) leads to the assumption that the monolingual perspective will not continue to be the unmarked case. This journal will contribute to enhancing bilingualism as the majority and common fact along the populations of the world, reversing the traditional and very conservative point of view. Also, the problems and phenomena labelled as 'bilingualism' are a promising area of encounter between psycholinguists and sociolinguists. This has, in fact, been outlined in foundational sociolinguistics, apart from being extremely interesting for the

development of language theory itself. We shall be devoting considerable attention to this in the pages of *Sociolinguistic Studies*, both from sociolinguistic, psycho-sociolinguistic, interactional and pragmatic-conversational, intercultural communication, educational, planning oriented and sociopolitical points of view.

Sociolinguistic Studies also pays special attention to the intersection between language and culture, minority languages and cultures, language contact and change, language and culture maintenance, shift and loss, language and social inequalities, and language planning and policy.

The journal publishes substantial research papers, discussion notes, reviews and review articles and regularly publishes thematic issues.

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Dis/Continuity in the Representation of Gender in Names Across Cultures: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT: Given names in many countries are typically sex-specific, whether this is legally enforced or completely unregulated. Gender-neutral names have been rare, have tended to evolve from masculine names, and have been seen as more advantageous for girls than boys, to whom sex stereotyping is more rigidly applied. However, in the context of recent shifts in gender equality and in conceptualizations of gender as nonbinary, linguistic marking of gender through names may itself be changing over time and exhibit variations across different language cultures. Our main goal in this special issue is to advance knowledge on contemporary gender-related personal naming practices through examining evidence about continuities and discontinuities in linguistic representations of gender in given names. We bring together a collection of studies that explore how gender is marked through names in a range of language cultures in Europe (Spanish, Bulgarian, and German) and Asia (Japanese and Mandarin Chinese). In this introductory article, we provide an overview of changing societal contexts of gender relations and identities that frame developments in the linguistic marking of gender through names, review research literature, and outline a theoretical background for the articles included in the special issue.

KEYWORDS: gendered names, gender-neutral names, given names, globalization, internationalization, naming practices, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, Japan, Taiwan

Introduction

In many countries, given names (that is, ‘individual names’, also referred to as ‘first names’ or ‘forenames’) are typically sex-specific (Alford, 1988), whether this is legally enforced or completely unregulated, and gender-neutral names have been rather rare. In some languages, such as English and Japanese, given names are

not linguistically obligated to indicate a person's sex category, suggesting that the representation of sex and gender in names in these languages is socially motivated (Pilcher, 2017). Previous research on given name selection in the United States has pointed out that gender-neutral names tend to evolve from masculine names (Barry & Harper, 1982, 1993) and are seen as more advantageous for girls than boys, to whom sex stereotyping is more rigidly applied (e.g., Slovenko, 1986; Lieberman et al., 2000). However, in the contexts of recent shifts around gender equality and in conceptualizations of gender, contemporary developments suggest that such tendencies can vary across cultures and are themselves undergoing change. For example, parenting and baby name websites report and reflect an increasing interest in given names that do not indicate a child's sex or gender (see, e.g., Nameberry, 2024). In Japan, not only are gender-neutral names on the rise, but a number of them were originally used only for girls (e.g., Makino, 2017; Barešová, 2020). In other languages, such as Czech, gender markings are linguistically obligatory (e.g., Sussex & Cubberley, 2006), meaning that choosing to use gender-neutral names may have a larger impact on the language long-term. Considering such developments, our main goal in this special issue is to advance the present state of knowledge on contemporary gender-related personal naming practices. We bring together a collection of studies examining gender in given names across a range of cultures in Europe (Bulgaria, Germany, and Spain) and Asia (Japan and Taiwan). Comparisons of name trend developments also include several other European as well as north American cultures. Contributions incorporate the latest findings on current preferences for expressing gender in names, identifying historical shifts, regional and cultural specifics, and their interactions with more general trends in gender relations and identities.

In this introduction to the special issue, we set the scene for our focus on dis/continuities in representations of gender in names in various languages and cultures. We begin by describing the broader context of changes in theorizations of gender identities and in global trends in gender equality, which we argue provide a backdrop to shifts in the relationship between gender and names within languages. We then review ways languages have typically signaled gender through names. Finally, we describe and summarize the contribution each author in this special issue has made to the development of new understandings of the topic of gender and names in languages and cultures, and conclude by identifying common themes suggested by their evidence and arguments.

Shifts in Theorizations of Gender

As one of us has argued elsewhere, the empirical study and academic theorizing of gender have relatively short histories (Whelehan & Pilcher, 2004). In disciplines

like sociology, it was only after the 1960s that differences and inequalities between women and men began to be more widely recognized as substantive problems to be examined and explained. Initially, academic work was preoccupied with filling in the gaps in knowledge about women's identities and experiences, caused by tendencies of androcentrism in prior theorizing and empirical research. This phase of 'adding women in' gradually morphed by the 1980s to a burgeoning of understanding that men, too, are gendered. Consequently, 'men's studies' emerged in the 1990s as a cross-disciplinary field and accompaniment to the already established 'women's studies'. Fast forward to the present day, and while the binarism and separatism of women's studies and men's studies still exists, these are now sub-specialisms of more sophisticated and inclusive 'gender studies' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017).

The sophistication and inclusivity of present-day gender studies is entangled with developments in postmodernist and poststructuralist theorizing, which together deconstructed conventional notions of 'women' and 'men' as separate, binary, essentialist, and cohesive categories based on embodied experiences and identities. Popular, everyday gender ideologies in most (if not all) countries of the world recognize binary sex categories as the biological foundation onto which cultural practices of binary gender are added. These dominant ideologies result in two normative and interconnected categories of sex, gender, and sexual identity: 'male-man-masculine-heterosexual' and 'female-woman-feminine-heterosexual' (adapted from Wade & Ferree, 2019). In contrast, contemporary academic theorizing typically conceptualizes both gender and sexuality (albeit from various ontological and epistemological positionings) as things that people 'do'—including through language and names—rather than behavior emergent from, and tied to, a birth-assigned binary sex category (e.g., Butler, 1990; Kessler & McKenna, 1985). As well as capturing people who are cis-gender (that is, identify with the female-bodied or male-bodied sex categories assigned to them at birth), contemporary conceptualizations of gender also recognize people with a range of sexualities, as well as people whose bodies are intersex, or who are transgender, or gender-fluid, or nonbinary, or genderqueer. Moreover, such inclusive theorizations recognize gender and sexualities as intersecting (Crenshaw, 1989) with other experiences and identities of race and ethnicity, age, class, and/or bodily ability, for example (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Languages too have adapted, evident in a proliferation of 'labels' to describe multifarious gender and sexuality identities, in the lexicon of pronouns (Baron, 2020) and, relatedly, in the increased normalcy within official organizational administrative processes in some countries allowing people multiple choices of identification and/or to describe themselves using an entirely alternative, self-defined vocabulary.

Theorizations of gender, along with the evolution of language we use about gender identities, can themselves be located within broader contexts of global trends in gender equalities, as we discuss next.

Global Trends in Gender Equalities

A manageable way for us to convey the otherwise amorphous topic of global developments in gender equalities is to note the activities of the United Nations (UN) (UN, 2023). Its founding charter in 1945 included recognition of the importance of equality between women and men, and subsequently it has led a sustained series of global equality initiatives. By the 2020s, the UN signaled a move away from its initial sex and gender binarism to a more inclusive recognition of the plurality of genders and diversities in sexualities (UN, 2021).

However, progress on gender equality and recognition of diversity in identities of gender and sexuality are processes that are geopolitically uneven. Europe ranks highest for gender equality and the Middle East and North Africa region is the furthest away from it (World Economic Forum, 2023). According to the World Economic Forum (2023), there is not yet one country in the world that has achieved full gender equality between women and men—although Iceland is closest to doing so. Of the main countries discussed by authors in this special issue on representations of gender in names across languages and cultures, it is Germany (see Balbach, this issue) that is ranked highest for gender equality, followed by Spain (see Fernández Juncal, this issue), Bulgaria (see Vlahova-Angelova, this issue), and Japan (see Barešová and Nakaya, and also Unser-Schutz, this issue). Taiwan—a country discussed in this issue by Li and Allasonnière-Tang—is a leading progressive country in the Asian region for gender equality (Outright International, 2023).

Alongside periods of global progressive shifts toward gender equality and the recognition of diversity in gender identities and sexualities, there are also times of regression where the momentum of progress stalls or goes backwards. In 2022 the UN reported that existing gender inequality had recently been exacerbated by multiple global challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, wars and violent conflict, climate change, and the backlash against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in several countries, including the United States of America (UN, 2022). Debates on gendered pronouns in languages may be centuries old (Baron, 2020), but the role language has in promoting and representing gender and sexual equality, diversity, and inclusion remains controversial in the 21st century within European countries such as France, Spain, Germany, and Italy (Jones et al., 2023). For example, in 2023, the French Senate voted in favor of a proposal to ban the use of less-gendered terminology (such as 'iel', a mix of

the masculine pronoun ‘il’ and the feminine pronoun ‘elle’) in official documents (Jones et al., 2023). Of course, in languages, gender is not only indicated through pronouns and other parts of speech but also—as evidenced within this special issue—through given names.

How Has Gender Been Expressed Through Given Names?

Alford (1988:65–68) found out in his study of naming practices in 60 different societies that gender is the most frequent piece of information conveyed through given names. It can be encoded in names through their morphology, especially gender-specific suffixes or prefixes, or semantically. Additionally, names can be attributed to men or women by convention.

The morphological expression of gender can be symmetrical, involving both masculine and feminine names (e.g., *Antonio–Antonia*, *Julio–Julia*), or asymmetrical, usually concerning only feminine names, which are derived from their masculine counterparts (e.g., *Carl–Carla*, *Martin–Martina*) (Handschuh, 2019). In languages that possess grammatical gender, given names may reflect the gender-marking of common nouns, as seen, for example, in Bulgarian or Czech. While German also has grammatical gender, the frequent gender markers of feminine names *-a* and *-e* were adopted from Latin and French, respectively (Handschuh, 2019). It is important to note that the gender perception of a name can differ across languages. For instance, the name *Andrea* is one of the most common Italian names for men, although in German, French, Czech, Polish, and several other languages it is considered a name for women.

Given names can also be gender marked semantically, i.e., through their meaning, which can either directly denote or be associated with men or women. Many names that have been in use for centuries have, however, become semantically opaque (Anderson, 2007:86) or come from a different language, making it difficult to discern their meaning from the name itself. For instance, the name *Anna*, widely used in many countries, carries the meaning of ‘grace, graciousness’ (Knappová, 2010), a fact that is typically known only to those who have researched its etymology. In contrast, the name *Grace* is semantically transparent and is stereotypically associated with women due to the qualities the word *grace* represents. Similarly, names derived from flowers, such as *Rose* or *Lily*, also carry stereotypical associations with women.

Semantic marking of gender can be well observed, for example, in Chinese and Japanese names, which are written in logographic Chinese characters *hanzi* and adapted Chinese characters *kanji*, respectively. The Chinese feminine name 花 (*Hua*) and Japanese feminine name 花 (*Hana*) mean ‘flower’, which, as mentioned above, is stereotypically associated with women. In contrast, the semantic content

of the Chinese masculine name 志強 (*Zhi-Qiang*; ‘aspiration’ + ‘strong’) and the Japanese masculine name 強志 (*Tsuyoshi*; ‘strong’ + ‘aspiration’) is stereotypically associated with men.

A given name can also be recognized as a name for boys or girls by convention. For example, the German names *Ludwig* and *Hedwig* have a similar structure and do not display any gender-specific morphological or semantic features, yet the former is conventionally attributed to men and the latter to women. According to Alford (1988:79), gender attribution is most commonly based on convention and on gender-distinctive suffixes and prefixes, and less commonly based on the meaning of the names.

Given names in most developed societies are not exclusively of one type, i.e., they do not distinguish men’s and women’s names solely through their morphology, semantics, or by convention. For example, in Germany, most names are conventionally classified as names for men or women, but some also express gender through suffixes (Oelkers, 2003), such as the above-mentioned *-a* (*Anna*, *Paula*). In addition to semantic marking, morphological marking is very common in Japanese names, typically achieved through gender-specific onymic suffixes. The name *Tsuyoshi* is recognized as a masculine name not solely based on the meaning conveyed by the *kanji* used, but especially due to its structure. The *-shi* suffix is typically masculine (e.g., Sakuma, 1969:205). Similarly, the names *Haruto* and *Haruna* share the same onymic base, *haru*, but are differentiated by gender-specific suffixes *-to* and *-na*, respectively.

Several studies from English-speaking countries have established a connection between the phonology of given names and their perceived gender, revealing significant phonological differences that exist between names given to boys and those given to girls. These studies have demonstrated that feminine names often have more syllables compared with their masculine counterparts and their initial syllables are frequently unstressed (e.g., Slater & Feinman, 1985; Cutler et al., 1990; Cassidy et al., 1999). Feminine names typically end in a vowel or sonorant sound (Slater & Feinman, 1985; Barry & Harper, 1995, 2000; Cassidy et al., 1999), and generally contain more vowels than masculine names (Whissell, 2001; He, 2020). More recent studies have shown that German names display similar phonological distinctions (Oelkers, 2003; Ackermann & Zimmer, 2021). These phonological differences, however, do not apply universally. In Japanese, for example, the final sound—usually a vowel except for the moraic nasal /N/—falls short of effectively indicating the name’s gender (Ackermann & Zimmer, 2021:1159). However, certain end syllables are indeed indicative of gender (Mutsukawa, 2007; Barešová, 2016, 2020; Unser-Schutz, 2016).

In certain languages, names that are not associated with a particular gender in their phonological form may express gender through their written representa-

tion. This is true especially for languages that utilize logographic scripts, such as the above-mentioned Chinese and Japanese. Same-sounding names can indicate different genders depending on the characters used to write them. The Japanese name *Hinata*, which has been recently extremely popular for both boys and girls, looks masculine when written, for example, as 陽太 ('sun' + 'big around/grand') but feminine when written as 日菜詩 ('day/sun' + 'rapeseed blossom' + 'poem'). Similar examples can be found in Chinese. The graphic forms 新宇 ('new' + 'universe') and 欣羽 ('happy/joyous/delighted' + 'feather') are both read as *Xinyu*, but the former is given to boys and the latter to girls. A limited number of examples can be found even in names written using the Latin alphabet. Some English names are gender-neutral in their pronunciation but gender-specific in their spelling, e.g., *Francis–Frances*, *Noah–Noa*, etc. (Lieberson et al., 2000).

Names that are given to both girls and boys are referred to by different terms, including unisex, androgynous, gender-neutral, and more recently, gender-fluid and nonbinary. Although these terms carry various nuances, they are often used interchangeably. As previously mentioned, in most societies the majority of names are given either to girls or to boys (Alford, 1988). However, across various countries, there is an emerging trend toward increased interest in names without gender-distinctive features. For example, according to Cohen (2023), androgynous names have reached a historic peak in the United States, reaching over 6% in 2022, a stark contrast to the less than 2% recorded half a century ago. Name androgyny is also on the rise in England and Wales, at currently around 3% (Cohen, 2023).

The Articles in This Issue

This special issue comprises studies that explore dis/continuities in names and gender across a variety of cultures, primarily focusing on three European (Bulgarian, German, and Spanish) and two Asian (Japanese and Taiwanese). Languages used in these cultures are diverse in terms of their origin and typology, which influence how gender is treated in their grammar, and how it is represented in their naming systems (Handschuh, 2019). German, representing the Germanic language family, is an inflected language (Britannica, 2023), as is Spanish, belonging to the Romance language family (Posner & Sala, 2023). Bulgarian, a Slavic language written in the Cyrillic alphabet, also features a rich system of inflectional and derivational morphology (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006). All three of these European languages possess grammatical gender, with Spanish having masculine and feminine genders and German and Bulgarian featuring masculine, feminine, and neuter genders. Japanese is part of the Japonic or Japanese-Ryukyuan language family. It is an agglutinative, mora-timed language that stands out for its unique writing system, which combines logographic characters and phonographic syllabaries (Iwasaki,

2013). Last, Chinese, which falls under the Sino-Tibetan language family and is used in Taiwan, is an isolating language with tonal distinctions and a logographic writing system (Norman, 1988).

In addition to language characteristics, personal naming practices, including the representation of gender in names, are also influenced by various legal restrictions. Unlike Japan, Taiwan, and Bulgaria, where there are no regulations on given names with respect to gender, in Spain, names that confuse the child's gender are forbidden (Fernández Juncal, this issue). In Germany, it is not possible for a girl to receive a boys' name and vice versa, and until quite recently, a child's first name clearly had to indicate their gender, or if a gender-neutral first name was used, another, gender-specific name was required (Balbach, this issue).

The first article ('Gender-neutral names—A boundary phenomenon in the Bulgarian anthroponomasticon') explores gender-neutral names in Bulgaria, which, according to its author, Maya Vlahova-Angelova, represent a marginal phenomenon, but their visibility has been steadily increasing. This trend is seen as part of larger changes in the Bulgarian name stock, notably the ongoing internationalization and cultural convergence of given names. Drawing upon official statistical data encompassing the names of 8,521 children born in the three largest Bulgarian cities—Sofia, Plovdiv, and Varna—during 2009 and 2010, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of 29 names that have been identified as being given to both boys and girls. It offers a detailed classification and linguistic description of these names, including one type whose evolution is considered specific to Bulgaria. Potential mechanisms of the emergence of gender-neutral names are explained within the broader context of the rising prevalence of unconventional names in the Bulgarian onomasticon. These unconventional names include foreign names that are no longer adapted to the Bulgarian language, i.e., they do not take on feminine endings, as was common in the past, as well as newly created names. Collectively, these factors are argued by the author to impact the traditional gender distinction within Bulgarian names.

Anna-Maria Balbach ('Emilia, Noah, or Charly? Current developments of boys', girls', and gender-neutral names in Germany and other (European) countries') also examines the topic of gender neutrality in given names, including the important issue of what counts as a gender-neutral name. Their initial focus is baby-naming trends in Germany, where gender-neutral names are shown to be relatively low in frequency, names that tend to be international in origin, and/or are often names that may sound the same but whose quality of 'gender neutrality' are compromised by gendered distinctions in spelling (e.g., *Noa* for a girl and *Noah* for a boy). Balbach widens her analysis by comparing trends she identifies in Germany with those found in five other European countries and in the USA. Balbach's cross-national comparative analysis shows that, overall,

gender-neutral names (using a restricted definition of this concept) only have a small role in baby-naming. However, she notes trends toward a phonological convergence of girls' and boys' names through a growing similarity in, for example, the number of syllables and/or vowels and consonant ending sounds. Balbach argues that these developments show that some parents are reducing gender-marking through naming but without choosing strictly gender-neutral names.

Carmen Fernández Juncal ('Gender distinction in European Spanish anthroponyms') analyzes gender distinctions in first names within European Spanish. They use a dataset from Spain's National Institute of Statistics to undertake a longitudinal analysis from the 1930s to the present day. Like Balbach, Fernández Juncal analyzes features such as the number of syllables and/or the type of consonant endings in names given to girls compared with names given to boys. Here, Fernández Juncal shows that there has been a process of specialization in European Spanish names, whereby the ending *-a* disappears from the repertoire of boys' names and increases exponentially among names for girls, and the ending *-o* is strongly linked to boys' names. Using a different source of data, Fernández Juncal is also able to move from a focus on baby names to consider how people in Spain who are gender nonconforming display their identities through renaming themselves. First names that are unambiguously feminine or unambiguously masculine are favored by people who are transgender, but nonbinary people in Spain choose first names without such connotations. Fernández Juncal draws their argument together by concluding that, despite changes in how it is marked, gender distinction remains a notable feature of names in European Spanish.

The next article ('Gender-neutral names in the youngest Japanese generation: Characteristics of their phonological and graphic forms') shifts the focus of the special issue away from gender and names in European cultures and languages to gender and names in Asian cultures and languages. Authors Ivona Barešová and Tereza Nakaya examine gender-neutral given names in Japan, a name type that is still low in frequency but growing in popularity. Like Balbach, the authors consider how to define a gender-neutral name and, further, note how the measurement and comparison of trends cross-nationally is made additionally difficult due to striking variations in the availability of country-level data. In contrast to some countries, like the USA and England and Wales, Japan does not offer publicly available lists of all registered birth names. To overcome this obstacle, Barešová and Nakaya draw on a corpus of over 15,000 baby names collected from a popular Japanese parenting website between 2008 and 2022. Their analysis is focused on names given both to girl and boy children and names that can be more strictly defined as gender-neutral, and considers their phonological form (their sound) as well as

their graphic form in Japanese *kanji*. The authors show that gender-neutral naming in Japan has specific features that are related, among other things, to the use of *kanji*, making it possible for a name to be gender-neutral only in its phonological or in its graphic form.

Giancarla Unser-Schutz ('The role of baby-naming guides in the presentation of gender in names: A case study of the Tamahiyo baby-naming guides') also focuses on contemporary Japanese naming practices. However, unlike other authors in this issue who analyze actual names given to babies, Unser-Schutz adopts a different approach by concentrating on the discourse regarding name selection and the name lists presented in one of the leading Japanese guides for expectant parents. Specifically, Unser-Schutz examines how gender is addressed within this text, which offers advice to parents on selecting the best name for their baby. Additionally, Unser-Schutz quantitatively examines the distribution of *kanji* recommended for use in girls' and boys' names. The analysis is conducted on two editions of Tamahiyo baby-naming guides published 20 years apart (in 2003 and 2023). Unser-Schutz's interpretations of their findings provide an intriguing insight into the role this influential baby-naming guide may play in the dissemination and changing public perception of gender in names. The author concludes that, despite the overall high level of innovation exhibited by Tamahiyo (Kobayashi, 2009), it has a rather conservative approach to the recent phenomenon of gender-neutral names. However, by not explicitly emphasizing or focusing on gendered names, such guides may, in fact, contribute to shaping shifts in the expression of gender within names.

The last article, by Pei-Ci Li and Marc Allassonnière-Tang ('Gendered and gender-neutral naming practices in Mandarin Chinese: Metaphoric and non-metaphoric imagery over time in Taiwan'), provides both a contemporary and historical perspective on gendered and gender-neutral names in Taiwanese society. It utilizes data from the Taiwanese Ministry of Interior, which includes the 100 most frequently bestowed masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral names in the population, along with the corresponding numbers of people having each name. Additionally, it examines the 10 most frequently used names in each decade over the past century. Specifically, it analyzes the Chinese characters, *hanzi*, used in women's names, men's names, and gender-neutral names, categorizing them into several semantic groups to determine their prevalence with each gender. According to the authors, the results indicate that men face higher social expectations compared with women. Furthermore, they appear to suggest that characters used in men's names are seen as generic, with qualities associated with masculinity considered applicable to both genders. However, the opposite scenario does not hold true: categories traditionally associated with women cannot be applied to men without encountering devaluation. The diachronic analysis revealed that in

the past, men's names displayed greater diversity compared with women's names. However, in recent decades, both boys' and girls' names have exhibited similar levels of diversity.

Gender and Given Names: Concluding Remarks

In this special issue, Fernández Juncal concludes their article on gender distinctions in Spanish with a reminder that preferences and trends in names are not random, but instead reflect social and cultural values and processes. Indeed, all authors in this special issue on dis/continuities in the representation of gender in names located their findings and arguments within the specific socio-cultural contexts of the country or countries and language(s) they examined. Some country-specific and/or language-specific factors emerged as significant influences upon gendered naming, such as the absence of, or as discussed by Fernández Juncal, and by Balbach, the presence of, laws prohibiting gender-ambiguous given names. The representation of names in graphic forms, as discussed by Barešová and Nakaya, by Unser-Schutz, and by Li and Allasonnière-Tang, is another example of how specific cultures and/or language forms make a difference to how gendered naming is expressed.

As mentioned in the introduction, American studies from the last decades of the 20th century showed that gender-neutral names usually evolve from masculine names, as it is more common for girls to receive masculine names than for boys to receive feminine names (Barry & Harper, 1982, 1993; Lieberman et al., 2000). Balbach's research indicates that this pattern holds true for Germany, France, England/Wales, and Denmark, while Vlahova-Angelova observes the same trend in Bulgaria and Fernández Juncal in Spain. However, Balbach's analysis also reveals that in the Netherlands, the ratio between girls receiving names more commonly given to boys and boys receiving names more commonly given to girls is almost balanced, and in the United States, the difference is diminishing. Barešová and Nakaya note that many Japanese names currently used as gender-neutral were originally used as names for girls. Additionally, they point to an increasing number of boys' names displaying feminine features, a phenomenon recently observed in the United States as well (Kihm, 2023).

Alongside illuminating such country-specific or linguistic-specific factors, the authors of articles in this special issue also point to several trends that appear to be cross-national in their significance. Various contributors to this issue have evidenced an increasing taste among more recent cohorts of namegivers for less conventionally gender-distinctive baby names, a trend emerging against the backdrop, outlined earlier in this introduction, of sophisticated theorizations of sex and gender, and of global developments in gender-related equality. This development

also seems to be closely related to the growing diversity of names observed in many countries, including those examined in this issue, reflecting an increased emphasis on individuality and uniqueness (e.g., Twenge et al., 2010; Ogihara et al., 2015; He, 2020). As discussed by Vlahova-Angelova, by Balbach, by Barešová and Nakaya, and by Li and Allasonnière-Tang, although many currently used names are not always straightforwardly gender-neutral names, there are some signs of change in the ways that names for girls and names for boys are distinguished, e.g., through sounds, endings, and spellings.

Several authors, including Vlahova-Angelova, Fernández Juncal, and Barešová and Nakaya, note how within a country and/or language, internationalization is a source of change in the marking of gender through names, which can mean the introduction of new gender-neutral names. In part, internationalization of names can be linked to trends in global migration. However, we also point to connections between internationalization and what we call the 'Netflix' effect. Our choice of term here is not intended to emphasize the singular influence of this particular global streaming platform, but rather to convey how digital culture (including, e.g., YouTube and TikTok) seamlessly crosses national borders and makes diverse cultures and languages more accessible, including via viewer choices to opt for dubbing or subtitles. The Netflix effect, along with global migration, means that recent, current, and upcoming cohorts of namegivers had or have increased exposure to a greater and more diverse cultural and linguistic treasure trove of given names that, potentially at least, mark gender in ways that are different to those prevailing in their own cultural and linguistic conventions.

Our special issue does not claim to comprehensively map gender distinctions through names but, collectively, authors in this special issue do extend understandings of recent trends in gendered naming through their examination of several European cultures and languages and two Asian ones. The theme of this special issue exposes both the potential and the limitations of cross-national analysis of trends in given names. For example, several of our authors explore gender-neutral names, a focus that highlights the ongoing difficulties of how best to define and measure this evidently increasingly important type of given name in ways that allow robust comparisons of cross-national trends. Cross-national comparison of trends in given names is further complicated by the contrasting availability, size, scope, and representativeness of national datasets.

Apart from Fernández Juncal, whose analysis extends to renaming by gender-nonconforming people, the authors in this special issue mostly examine data on how babies are named. As argued by Balbach (in this issue), there remains plentiful scope for more cross-national social and linguistic research on dis/continuities in names and gender. Types of and patterns in (re)naming or given name changing by adults in later life is one such area. We hope this special issue draws attention

to the valuable contributions that have already been made to international and interdisciplinary research on the fascinating and complex topic of gender and names, while also stimulating further exploration.

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Gender-Neutral Names: A Boundary Phenomenon in the Bulgarian Anthroponomasticon

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ABSTRACT: Since the beginning of the 21st century, names that can be attributed to both girls and boys have been present in Bulgarian name lists. Such gender-neutral names are still rarely used as official names and are regarded as an innovation. They have appeared in Bulgarian naming practices as a result of the adoption of foreign naming patterns and have been interpreted as a boundary phenomenon in the contemporary anthroponomasticon as they contradict Bulgarian naming traditions and signify that traditional naming patterns are undergoing changes. Based on the official statistical data, this article describes how gender-neutral names in Bulgaria have evolved, what their nature and linguistic characteristics are, and last but not least, whether there are any specific features of Bulgarian gender-neutral names. Analyses have revealed a total of 29 forenames attributed to both girls and boys. Among these, three types of names have been identified: 1) diminutive names ending in *-i*: *Niki, Toni*; 2) borrowings such as *Enis, Noa*; and 3) a specific Bulgarian *Rozalin* type of gender-neutral name.

KEYWORDS: gender neutral names, Bulgarian, baby names, foreign naming patterns, androgynization

Introduction

Since the start of the 21st century, systematic observations of newborn names in Bulgaria have shown that names that can be attributed to both girls and boys are already present in name lists, albeit on the periphery (Choleva-Dimitrova & Yanev, 2015; Dancheva, 2019; Choleva-Dimitrova & Vlahova-Angelova, 2019). Likewise, in other geographical areas, particularly in some European countries, the USA, and Japan, the number of forenames used for both girls and boys is growing, and some researchers argue that names seem to be affected by androgynization—a loss of gender specificity. In Bulgaria, such gender-neutral names are rarely used as official

names and are regarded as an innovation in naming practices because they have only recently started to appear regularly in name lists and they stand out noticeably as atypical. In this respect, gender-neutral names can be interpreted as a boundary phenomenon in the Bulgarian anthroponomasticon, as they are “deviations from the norm” (Barry & Harper, 1993:228) and signify that traditional naming patterns are undergoing changes.

The appearance of gender-neutral names in the Bulgarian context could be seen as a consequence of the cultural unification and intensification of name and naming pattern borrowings, but also as a consequence of recent shifts in the conceptualization of gender and sex equality. Considering the complex effects of these facts, here we raise the question of whether the emergence of names that could be attributed to both women and men reveals a shift toward a sustainable discontinuity in the representation of gender in the domain of Bulgarian personal names, or whether, as Barry & Harper (1982:22) conclude, “[u]nisex names [...] may be expected to become more popular, but they are not likely to become preponderant.” Nevertheless, similar trends toward degendering have been seen within patronyms (Choleva-Dimitrova & Vlahova-Angelova, 2019) and even within family names (Vlahova-Angelova & Petkova, 2023).

Androgynous names are a new phenomenon observed in other anthroponymic systems that have no regulatory mechanisms prohibiting their use, e.g., Romania (Felecan, 2015) and The Netherlands (Schmuck, 2018). In some European countries, such as Sweden (Brylla, 2009:177) and Germany (Nübling, 2018), their use was until recently officially limited (see, e.g., Leibring, 2018), while in Poland they are completely forbidden (Walkowiak, 2016). Against this backdrop, there are no proscriptions or restrictions regarding the choice of gender-neutral names for newborn children in Bulgaria (*Zakon za grazhdanskata registratsiya* [Civil Registration Law]), although this practice does contradict Bulgarian naming tradition (Kovachev, 1995; Ilchev, 2012). With regard to how gender-neutral names in Bulgaria arise and are validated, we can say that similar processes are being observed in other personal naming systems (Barry & Harper, 1982, 1993; Lieberman, Dumais, & Bauman, 2000; Brylla, 2009; Felecan, 2015; Nübling, 2018).

Gender-neutral names, as argued by Lieberman et al. (2000:1251), “do not serve as gender markers,” and thus violate the strong “genus-sexus” congruence (Schmuck, 2018:272) feature of Bulgarian personal names through structural changes (Nübling, 2012:320)—for instance, by dropping the obligatory feminine endings *-a/-я* (*-a/-ya*).¹ Furthermore, from a sociolinguistic point of view, their emergence in the Bulgarian context is closely connected to some current processes in the internationalization of naming patterns. Similarly, in Romania, “the import of foreign naming patterns” (Felecan, 2015:149) has much to do with the appearance of gender-neutral names. As for Bulgaria, the borrowing of exotic foreign

names significantly affects the structure of names and has enabled the appearance of new gender-neutral names. Therefore, we consider structural changes within forenames as a consequence of intensified name borrowing and as a main vehicle facilitating current transitions in the traditional gender coding of forenames. The goal of the research is to investigate how foreign naming models introduced in Bulgaria help to advance the appearance of new gender-ambiguous names, what their linguistic characteristics are, and, last but not least, whether there are any typically Bulgarian features of these gender-neutral names.

Current Shifts in the Gender Coding of Bulgarian Forenames

A personal name traditionally indicates the gender of its bearer (Alford, 1988; see also Barry & Harper, 1982; Schmuck, 2018). Moreover, Alford came to the conclusion that “gender is the characteristic most commonly conveyed by a name—more often than any other feature of the child” (Alford, 1988:67–68, from Lieberman et al., 2000:1251). Gender-neutral names are not characteristic of the Bulgarian personal name system, unlike in cultures in which the same names can be both masculine and feminine. In Bulgarian tradition, names are gender differentiated mainly, but not only, *formally*—by inflection or suffixation,² but also *conventionally* (Alford, 1988, from Schmuck, 2018). The vast majority of Bulgarian names are formally gender-coded and exist in both masculine and feminine varieties: *Божидар* (*Bozhidar*), m., and *Божидара* (*Bozhidara*), f.; *Венко* (*Venko*), m. and *Венка* (*Venka*), f.; *Георги* (*Georgi*), m., and *Гергана* (*Gergana*), f.; *Виктор* (*Viktor*), m., and *Виктория* (*Viktoria*), f.; *Цветан* (*Tsvetan*), m., and *Цветана* (*Tsvetana*), f., etc., and the endings and suffixes with which they are formed, having both masculine and feminine variants, serve as markers of gender (Ilchev, 2012:29). Female personal names are always marked due to the presence of a specific ending for the feminine grammatical gender *-а/-я* (*-a/-ya*)³ (Radeva, 2019:33), e.g., *Александър* (*Aleksandar*), m., and *Александра* (*Aleksandra*), f., *Мирослав* (*Miroslav*), m., and *Мирослава* (*Miroslava*), f., *Славей* (*Slavey*), m., and *Славейя* (*Slaveya*), f., etc. In other words, the morphological-phonological composition of the name indicates the gender to which it refers (see Barry & Harper, 1998; Lieberman et al., 2000; Mutsukawa, 2016; Nübling, 2018), and with regard to Bulgarian personal names, it can be generalized that masculine names end in a consonant or *-о* (*-o*)⁴ while feminine names end in *-а/-я* (*-a/-ya*) (see Kovachev, 1995; Ilchev, 2012).

Observations of contemporary personal names of newborns in Bulgaria, however, have shown increasingly frequent deviations from the rules just described, i.e., a departure from the traditional gender coding of names. This is a consequence of the fact that new names are more and more often borrowed from foreign

languages without adapting them to Bulgarian language norms, or new, unique names (neonyms) are created, and a significant part of these have an unconventional form (Choleva-Dimitrova & Yanev, 2015; Petkova, 2021; Choleva-Dimitrova et al., 2021). As a result, since the start of the 21st century, the number of personal names in which there is an “asymmetry between sex and grammatical gender” (Nitsolova, 2008:56) has significantly increased, and they are used in naming both boys and girls, especially when these are exotic and unusual names such as *Бену* (*Beni*), *Вилерже* (*Vilerzhe*), *Дуьгу* (*Duygu*), *Ефе* (*Efe*), *Меликсади* (*Meliksadi*), etc. On the other hand, the loss of gender determination (the degendering of names) is also associated with a situation in which “structures that were previously considered dominant for one gender are increasingly becoming more common and can also be chosen for the other gender” (Nübling, 2012:320). Proof of the difficulties in gendering such names is the fact that in the framework of a recent survey, the anthroponym *Никол* (*Nikol*) was defined as a gender-neutral name.⁵ The author of the study, not without reason, concludes that the ending of this anthroponym, i.e., in a consonant sound, plays a role in the consideration of this name as equally suitable for boys and girls (Levkova, 2022:136). In fact, in recent times, the number of names that cannot be unequivocally determined to be masculine or feminine by Bulgarian linguistic knowledge alone because their morphological-phonological form points to the opposite sex appears to be increasing—girls’ forenames with a zero ending: *Никол* (*Nikol*), *Ивиан* (*Ivian*), *Елен* (*Elen*), but also boys’ names ending in *-a* (*-a*), which are associated with feminine grammatical gender: *Ноя* (*Noa*), *Елиа* (*Elia*), as well as names with a common grammatical gender because of the presence of a final *-e*, *-u*, *-y* (*-e*, *-i*, *-u*): *Ефе* (*Efe*), *Иви* (*Ivi*), *Дуьгу* (*Duygu*).

Increase in Girls’ Forenames with a Zero Ending

Let us first look at girls’ forenames without the typical feminine ending. The emergence of names of this type has been a particularly active process in recent years (Vlahova-Angelova, 2020; Vlahova-Angelova & Petkova, 2023). For comparison, in the middle of the 20th century, “there were only about twenty female names ending in a consonant—some are from Bulgarian nouns (*Пролет* (*Prolet*) ‘spring’, *Радост* (*Radost*) ‘joy’), while others are outright foreign (*Жанет* (*Zhanet*), *Ивет* (*Ivet*), *Мадлен* (*Madlen*))” (Ilchev, 2012:20–23), but as early as the 1990s, after restrictions on the choice of personal names were removed, their number grew rapidly according to the statistical data of Angelova-Atanasova (2001), and new names such as *Мерлин* (*Merlin*), *Елизабет* (*Elizabet*), *Сузан* (*Suzan*), *Елиз* (*Eliz*), and *Катрин* (*Katrin*) appeared. At the beginning of the 21st century, the frequency of feminine names with a zero ending increased, and they comprised a notable percentage of all names attributed to girls, while at the same time, their diversity

also significantly increased (Vlahova-Angelova & Petkova, 2023). Our observations show that such names are extremely popular today⁶ and may be separated into two subgroups:

- (1) Newly borrowed and unadapted⁷ names from foreign languages, such as: *Абигейл* (Abigeyl) < *Abigail*;⁸ *Вивиян* (Viviyan) < *Vivian*; *Грейс* (Greys) < *Grace*; *Джанет* (Dzhanet) < *Janet*; *Жизел* (Zhizel) < *Gisele*; *Кармен* (Karmen) < *Carmen*; *Кърстен* (Karsten) < *Kirsten*; *Мерседес* (Mersedes) < *Mercedes*; *Надин* (Nadin) < *Nadine*; *Селест* (Selest) < *Céleste*; *Таус* (Tais) < *Thaïs*; *Юнон* (Yunon) < *Junone*, etc.;
- (2) Names with traditional counterparts ending in *-a* (*-a*): *Алис* (Alis) < *Алиса* (Alisa), *Анет* (Anet) < *Анета* (Aneta), *Евелин* (Evelin) < *Евелина* (Evelina), *Елен* (Elen) < *Елена* (Elena), *Жанет* (Zhanet) < *Жанета* (Zhaneta), *Ивон* (Ivon) < *Ивона* (Ivona), *Мадлен* (Madlen) < *Мадлена* (Madlena), *Николет* (Nikolet) < *Николета* (Nikoleta), *Сузан* (Suzan) < *Сузана* (Suzana), etc.

Our analyses further show that there has recently been strong competition between the new forms ending in a consonant and the traditional forms ending in *-a* (*-a*), e.g., *Ивона* (Ivona) vs. *Ивон* (Ivon), *Ирена* (Irena) vs. *Ирен* (Iren), *Изабела* (Izabela) vs. *Изабел* (Izabel), *Каролина* (Karolina) vs. *Каролин* (Karolin), etc., and in some pairs, the variant without an ending is preferred and more frequently used (see Vlahova-Angelova, 2020; Vlahova-Angelova & Petkova, 2023). This process is already increasingly affecting traditional names such as *Елен(а)* (Elen(a)) and *Ирен(а)* (Iren(a)), and is indirectly responsible for the emergence of a number of gender-neutral names as it leads to the emergence of new feminine forms parallel to previously existing masculine forms.

Increase in Forenames with Atypical Endings

In addition, the number of names borrowed from different languages with the non-traditional endings of *-y*, *-u*, *-e* (*-u*, *-i*, *-e*) has been growing recently (Petkova, 2021; Vlahova-Angelova & Petkova, 2023). It is well known that in the grammatical gender adaptation of loanwords entering the Bulgarian language, the strongest indicator for determining gender is morphological (Kyuvlieva, 1976:418); that is, in a form ending in a consonant, the grammatical gender will be masculine; if the form ends in *-a* (*-a*) or *-я* (*-ya*), the grammatical gender will be feminine; and if the form has some other ending, the grammatical gender will be neuter (Burov, 1997:6). As personal names cannot be neuter, examples ending in *-y*, *-u*, *-e* (*-u*, *-i*, *-e*) refer to names of common grammatical gender (Nitsolova, 2008:57–58; Chakarova, 2011) and they are potential gender-neutral names. In fact, a number of these names, especially those that are more familiar in the Bulgarian context,

are already associated with one of the two sexes. These include names such as *Емили* (*Emili*), f., *Натали* (*Natali*), f., *Габриеле* (*Gabriele*), m., *Роже* (*Rozhe*), m., and the like. The emergence of forenames with atypical endings is also related to the influence of foreign language patterns where forenames with such endings are typical: *Кристни* (*Kristi*), *Мелани* (*Melani*), *Дафне* (*Dafne*) or *Дефне* (*Defne*), *Тифани* (*Tifani*), *Су* (*Su*) (from English *Christy*, *Melanie*, *Daphne*, *Tiffany*, *Sue*); *Анри* (*Anri*), *Роже* (*Rozhe*), *Лулу* (*Lulu*), *Натали* (*Natali*) (from French *Henri*, *Roger*, *Lulu*, *Natalie*); *Ариадни* (*Ariadni*), *Елену* (*Eleni*) (from Greek *Αριάδνη*, *Ελένη*); *Емре* (*Emre*), *Инджу* (*Indzhi*) (from Turkish *Emre*, *Inci*). Names ending in *-u* (*-i*) are most common, with feminine names predominating over masculine (Vlahova-Angelova & Petkova, 2023), and there have been occasional new formations within Bulgaria, such as *Иви* (*Ivi*), f. and *Ивану* (*Ivani*), f., which can be interpreted as modernized variants of the traditional feminine names *Ива* (*Iva*) and *Ивана* (*Ivana*), but which could also serve unhindered as masculine.

Gender-Neutral Names in the Contemporary Bulgarian Anthroponomasticon

Our research is based on official statistical data on birth cohorts in the three largest cities of the country—Sofia, Plovdiv, and Varna—over two consecutive years—2009 and 2010. Data were provided by the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute. Our choice to focus on these three areas was dictated by the fact that the majority of children in Bulgaria are born in these cities, which is a consequence of both the greatly decreasing birth rate in recent decades and the concentration of the population in the largest cities (Aktualizirana natsionalna strategiya [Updated National Strategy]). Our inability to use data on newborns across the country further weighed in favor of this choice, as it is in these large cities that gender-neutral names, which are an atypical and rare phenomenon, are presumably more likely to be registered. The choice of 2009 and 2010, in turn, was determined by the fact that 2009 and 2010 were the last years for which we were able to obtain comprehensive statistical data, i.e., with the complete lists of personal names.⁹ A total of 8,521 personal names were included in the study that refer to all individuals in the lists for 2009 and 2010 in the three cities. The subject of analysis was all names used for both boys and girls, regardless of the number of their uses in the separate birth cohorts. Gender-neutral names registered in each of the six resulting corpora were extracted, and because the statistics used were limited, this did not allow us to focus on names defined as “unambiguously androgynous—that is, that are simultaneously used for boys and girls in a relatively balanced way [...] where each gender comprises at least one-third (and hence, no more than two-thirds) of the children bearing the name” (Lieberson et al., 2000:1263).

Name/city	Sofia		Plovdiv		Varna	
	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
Алекс (Aleks)	108M; 4F ¹⁰	114M; 10F	15M; 2F	31M; 1F	31M; 1F	26M; 3F
Андреа (Andrea) or Андрея ¹¹ (Andreya)	118F	1M; 82F	8F	2F	14F	8F
Анжел (Anzhel)	1M; 9F	1M; 12F	2F	2F	9F	4F
Анис (Anis)	–	1M	–	–	1F	1M
Габриел (Gabriel)	1M; 1F	–	–	–	–	–
Дани (Dani)	16M; 4F	12M	7M; 1F	3M	16M	10M; 1F
Дариан (Darian)	2M	3M	1M	1F	1M; 1F	5M
Даян (Dayan)	7M	3M	1F	1M	–	1M; 1F
Денис (Denis) or Дениз (Deniz)	1M; 1F	1M	–	–	1M	–
Евелин (Evelin)	82M	47M	11M; 2F	18M	24M; 2F	15M
Елен (Elen)	11M; 1F	15M; 1F	8M	3M; 1F	4M	3M
Енис (Enis)	6F	2M; 4F	2M; 3F	–	–	1F
Ивиан (Ivian)	2F	1F	1M	1F	–	–
Лилиан (Lilyan) or Лилиан (Lilian)	3M; 1F	–	1M	–	–	–
Марсел (Marsel)	–	1F	–	–	1M	–
Мартин (Marti)	1M; 1F	–	–	–	–	–
Матея (Matea) or Матей (Mateya)	1M	1M; 1F	1M	–	–	–
Мерджан (Merdzhan)	2F	2F	1F	–	2F	–
Ники (Niki)	4F	3F	1M; 1F	–	–	1F
Никита (Nikita)	–	–	1M; 1F	1F	–	–
Ноа (Noa)	1M; 2F	1M	3M	–	2M	1M
Розалин (Rozalin)	3M; 4F	5F	1F	–	–	–
Севги (Sevgi)	–	2M	1F	–	1M	–
Симон (Simon)	1M; 1F	–	2M	–	–	–
Тони (Toni)	–	–	2F	1M; 1F	–	–
Цвети (Tsveti)	2M; 1F	5M; 2F	1M	1M; 1F	2M; 1F	5M
	16M; 1F	4M; 1F	2M	4M	3M; 1F	5M
	6F	1M; 6F	–	1F	1F	–

Table 1: Full List of Gender-Neutral Names Found in 2 Years in a Row in Sofia, Plovdiv, and Varna

The results of the corpus research show that 29 names from all the names included in the study were used for both boys and girls (see Table 1). The names differed, however, in their presence in the individual corpora. *Анис* (*Anis*) and *Марсел* (*Marsel*) were found only in one corpus—Sofia (2009), while others featured in all or most of the corpora; for example, *Андреа* (*Andrea*), *Габриел* (*Gabriel*), *Дениз* (*Deniz*), *Денис* (*Denis*), etc. Regarding the frequency of these names, as expected, they were for the most part very rare, in single digits. Only *Алекс* (*Aleks*), m., *Андреа* (*Andrea*), f., and *Денис* (*Denis*), m. ranked among high-frequency names in the separate lists.

As can be seen from Table 1, these names were for the most part names used for both sexes, but they were predominantly associated with one of the two. For example, *Алекс (Aleks)*, *Габриел (Gabriel)*, *Дани (Dani)*, and *Ники (Niki)* were predominantly used for boys, while *Никита (Nikita)*, *Севгу (Sevgi)*, and *Цвети (Tsveti)* were predominantly used for girls. Those that occurred equally among boys and girls have very rare counts, single or double: *Анжел (Anzhel)*, *Анис (Anis)*, *Даян (Dayan)*, *Ивиан (Ivian)*, *Марсел (Marcel)*. The list also shows us that among the names that were used for both sexes, forenames that were new or rare, and not well-known, predominated, which corresponds with the observation by Lieberman et al., (2000:1266) that “androgyny is especially prominent among unanchored and new names.”

A reference in the *Frequency and Etymological Dictionary*, in turn, shows that some of the gender-indeterminate names encountered today have already been indicated by Kovachev (1995) as names used for both men and women in the 20th century: *Анис (Anis)*, *Дани (Dani)*, *Ники (Niki)*, *Тони (Toni)*, *Цвети (Tsveti)*—a fact that is a somewhat surprising. It can be seen, however, that these are mostly diminutive forms ending in *-u (-i)*, which appear as the main vehicle for the emergence and usage of gender-neutral names, and not only in Bulgaria (Lieberman et al., 2000; Felecan, 2015; Nübling, 2018). The contemporary list, however, differs in the content of its names as it also includes examples of names already established in the Bulgarian system, such as *Евелин (Evelin)*, *Елен (Elen)*, and *Розалин (Rozalin)*, which have undergone a process of *androgynization* (Nübling, 2012), and once being exclusively masculine names, they are now used for both sexes.¹²

Two examples from Table 1 also merit interest, as these are names characteristic of the Turkish ethnic community: *Севгу (Sevgi)* and *Мерджан (Merdzhan)*¹³ (< Tur. *Mercan*). These names are apparently also going through a process of losing their gender identity and are now in use as gender-neutral names, although traditionally *Севгу (Sevgi)* is feminine and *Мерджан (Merdzhan)* is masculine (Tahir, 2004). This fact can be interpreted as evidence that similar processes of androgynization of personal names are probably also being observed within the system of Turkish personal names in Bulgaria, but we do not have research or further observations on the matter.

Types of Gender-Neutral Names

Observations of the extracted names used for both boys and girls simultaneously give us reason to generalize that, currently, there are three main types of gender-neutral names in Bulgaria, which will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs. As for the first type—diminutive names ending in *-u (-i)*, as well as the

Name	Masculine (first registered)	Number of uses 1890–1980	Feminine (first registered)	Number of uses 1890–1980
Дани (Dani)	1897	179	1908	34
Дари (Dari)	1940	29	1950	5
Джани (Dzhani)	1924	10	1954	2
Люси (Lyusi)	1944	7	1892	122
Ники (Niki)	1947	16	1925	15
Поли (Poli)	1948	7	1932	48
Тони (Toni)	1898	2432	1892	254
Цвети (Tsveti)	1934	63	1947	27

Table 2: Examples of Gender-Neutral Names in the Period from 1890 to 1980, According to Kovachev (1995)

second—borrowed foreign names functioning as gender-neutral in the Bulgarian context, it was noted above that they are also characteristic of other name systems. However, it seems to us that the third type of name, the so-called *Розалин* (*Rozalin*) type, can be defined as one that developed on Bulgarian soil and, at least as far as we know, has no parallel elsewhere.

Diminutive Forms as Gender-Neutral Names

The appearance of the first gender-indeterminate names in the Bulgarian personal name system can be dated relatively precisely, to around the beginning of the 20th century, when the first examples were registered (see Table 2). These are, as stated, diminutive (cropped) personal names ending in *-u* (*-i*); they are not traditional for the Bulgarian language, but once they were borrowed, the model also began to extend to traditional names. From the data in Table 2, it is clear that these forms are sometimes seen as masculine and sometimes as feminine names, with the reason for the lack of gender coding being their ending. In Bulgaria, such gender-neutral names have been widespread since the middle of the 20th century, but as unofficial, diminutive names (pet forms of personal names): *Дими* (*Dimi*) from *Димитър* (*Dimitar*), m.; *Деси* (*Desi*) from *Десислава* (*Desislava*), f.; *Мони* (*Moni*) from *Симеон* (*Simeon*), m., or *Моника* (*Monika*), f.; *Пепи* (*Pepi*) from *Петър* (*Petar*), m., or *Петрана* (*Petrana*), f.; *Тони* (*Toni*) from *Антон* (*Anton*), m., or *Антония* (*Antoniya*), f., etc. In recent times, despite the fact that they are not neutral but expressive, and their form is practically a vocative, diminutives ending in *-u* (*-i*) have almost completely replaced the other traditional pet forms with the suffixes *-к(о)*, *-ч(о)*, *-б(о)* (*-k(o)*, *-ch(o)*, *-y(o)*), *-к(а)* (*-k(a)*), etc. and have increasingly been given as official names (Charalozova, 2023:219).

The data we analyzed from 2009 and 2010 show the presence of only four gender-neutral names of this sort: *Дани* (*Dani*), *Тони* (*Toni*), *Ники* (*Niki*), and *Цвети* (*Tsveti*) (see Table 1). Our expectation was that among the official forenames, the number of diminutive forms ending in *-u* (*-i*) and serving as gender-neutral names would be higher, considering the fact that they are becoming more common as official names. We believe that if the scope of the investigated data were extended temporally and/or territorially, their number would increase, because the lists we analyzed also contained other examples of diminutive forms ending in *-u* (*-i*), but referring only to either girls or boys.

Name Borrowings as Gender-Neutral Names

Another method for gender-neutral names to arise in Bulgaria has been through the direct transfer of new, foreign anthroponyms, without adaptation to the Bulgarian language (see Table 1). According to Kovachev (1995), it is clear that toward the middle of the 20th century, and in some cases a little earlier, foreign names began to be borrowed, which were sometimes used for both sexes. However, these are among names with very rare usage. For example, the personal name *Анис* (*Anis*) (abbreviated from the Gr. *Ioanis*, m. or from *Anisiya*, f.) has only four usages in the period 1890–1980—two as masculine names and two as feminine. *Анис* (*Anis*) was registered for the first time as a feminine name in 1936, while as a masculine name, it appeared for the first time in 1966 (Kovachev, 1995:51). The source language from which such gender-neutral names have been borrowed in Bulgarian is predominantly French—*Денис* (*Denis*) or *Дениз* (*Deniz*), *Ирен* (*Iren*), *Люсиен* (*Lyusien*) (Kovachev, 1995:168–169, 251, 323). More often, however, these names were initially borrowed as masculine names, and their feminine equivalents were adapted to the norms of the Bulgarian language, i.e., with the corresponding feminine ending *-a* (*-a*) or *-я* (*-ya*): *Анжел* (*Anzhel*) and *Анжела* (*Anzhela*), *Валери* (*Valeri*) and *Валерия* (*Valeriya*), *Габриел* (*Gabriel*) and *Габриела* (*Gabriela*), *Енис* (*Enis*) and *Ениса* (*Enisa*), *Марсел* (*Marsel*) and *Марсела* (*Marsela*), *Симон* (*Simon*) and *Симона* (*Simona*) (Kovachev, 1995). Only later did the names without an ending, i.e., the masculine personal names, begin to be used as feminine names, and thus new gender-neutral names such as *Анжел* (*Anzhel*), *Габриел* (*Gabriel*), *Енис* (*Enis*), *Марсел* (*Marsel*), and *Симон* (*Simon*) appeared. The process of turning a masculine name into a gender-neutral name, and its final establishment as a predominantly female name, is characteristic of names that are unisex (Barry & Harper, 1993; Lieberman et al., 2000; Felecan, 2015; Nübling, 2018), which once again confirms that the development of these anthroponyms in Bulgaria is similar to its development in other geographical areas.

The names *Андрея* (*Andreya*) and *Матея* (*Mateya*) represent a more peculiar case of androgyny development, which is a consequence of the co-existence of homophone names characteristic of two or more ethnolinguistic traditions when they occur as feminine in a given language and as masculine in another (see Lieberman et al., 2000:1270). In fact, the Bulgarian masculine *Андрея* (*Andreya*) and *Матея* (*Mateya*) are vestiges of ancient variants of the still popular biblical names *Андрей* (*Andrey*) and *Матей* (*Matey*) (Kovachev, 1995), borrowed alongside the very adoption of Christianity. The archaic variants are almost forgotten today. In more recent times, however, the given names *Андреа* (*Andrea*) or *Андрея* (*Andreya*) and *Матееа* (*Matea*) or *Матея* (*Mateya*)¹⁴ possess predominantly feminine associations (see Table 1), and they are thus transforming from masculine to feminine names. An important aspect of this process is due to feminine names that have become popular in Bulgaria, such as the Italian *Mattea* or the name *Andrea*, f., found in many countries, which have assisted with the transformation of the masculine Bulgarian names *Андрея* (*Andreya*) and *Матея* (*Mateya*) into feminine names. The case is similar to the development of another Orthodox name, *Никита* (*Nikita*), m., which was registered as a girl's name for the first time only in 1935 (Kovachev, 1995:381), and predominantly functions as such today (see Table 1). In this particular case, the popularity of a female film character was probably an additional factor contributing to this forename's change of gender.

The Розалин (Rozalin) Type of Gender-Neutral Name

The appearance of androgynous names is related to a process that can be distinctly observed in Bulgaria and which is perhaps a specifically Bulgarian phenomenon. The borrowing of female names with a zero ending, discussed above, has had a significant impact on this process, as it is also beginning to reflect on traditional Bulgarian feminine names. According to our understanding, the *Розалин* (*Rozalin*) type encompasses gender-neutral names formed on Bulgarian soil in which a given feminine name first becomes the basis for the appearance of a new masculine name by the loss of the characteristic ending *-a* (*-a*)¹⁵ and, at a later stage, a new feminine name is formed, again through the loss of the characteristic feminine gender ending. As has been previously discussed, there is a tendency to modernize traditional girls' names by forming new variants with a zero ending, e.g., ending in a consonant: *Елен* (*Elen*) < *Елена* (*Elena*), *Ивиан* (*Ivian*) < *Ивиана* (*Iviana*). These new girls' names are homonyms and homographs of previously existing boys' names, which has led to the appearance of new gender-neutral names. For example, *Розалина* (*Rozalina*), which was adapted from foreign *Rosalyn*, *Roselyn*, *Rosaleen*, *Rosalin*, *Rosalynne*, became the basis for the emergence of the mascu-

		First stage		Second stage		Third stage
Feminine name	→	New masculine name	→→	New feminine name	=	New gender-neutral name
Дариана (Dariana)	→	Дариан (Darian)	→→	Дариан (Darian)	=	Дариан (Darian)
Елена (Elena)	→	Елен (Elen)	→→	Елен (Elen)	=	Елен (Elen)
Евелина (Evelina)	→	Евелин (Evelin)	→→	Евелин (Evelin)	=	Евелин (Evelin)
Ивиана (Iviana)	→	Ивиан (Ivian)	→→	Ивиан (Ivian)	=	Ивиан (Ivian)
Розалина (Rozalina)	→	Розалин (Rozalin)	→→	Розалин (Rozalin)	=	Розалин (Rozalin)

Table 3: Formation Process of Gender-Neutral Names of the *Розалин (Rozalin)* Type

line *Розалин (Rozalin)* (Radeva, 2019:342) and, more recently, a variant *Розалин (Rozalin)* appeared, which is used for naming girls (see Table 3).

A strengthening of the process of forming new female names with a zero ending would potentially increase the emergence of even more new gender-neutral names of this type. Currently, according to our data, their number is not large (see Table 3), but more examples could be added in the near future, because a route to form gender-neutral names using this model has already entered the language.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that the total number of names of newborn children that were attributed to both girls and boys in the 2 years studied, e.g., that function as gender-neutral names, is 29. In fact, most of these were predominantly used for one of the two sexes (e.g. *Алекс (Aleks)*, *Андреа (Andrea)* or *Андрея (Andreya)*, and *Никита (Nikita)*), and those that were used in a more balanced way have very rare to singular tokens for the most part: *Анжел (Anzhel)*, *Анис (Anis)*, *Даян (Dayan)*, *Ивиан (Ivian)*, *Марсел (Marsel)*. Statistical analysis, although limited in scale, has revealed that these names are not yet common; however, their appearance attests to certain changes in the traditional gender marking of first names in the Bulgarian context. Therefore, gender-neutral names are regarded as a boundary phenomenon that may or may not find a permanent place in the Bulgarian personal naming system.

This analysis provides a basis on which to draw some conclusions regarding the mechanisms of the emergence and reproduction of this specific type of name in the modern Bulgarian personal naming system. First, the widespread use of diminutives ending in *-u (-i)* makes them the most common type of gender-neutral name (although, for the most part, they are not official, but pet

forms). Their emergence, as has been shown, is the result of foreign influence, as they began to penetrate Bulgarian language in the form of borrowings, and not infrequently as gender-neutral names, e.g., *Люси (Lyusi)*, *Джани (Dzhani)*, *Пол (Poli)*. Gradually, this model was transferred to traditional Bulgarian names, eventually establishing itself as the main model for the formation of diminutive/affectionate forms used today. Although the data we examined contained only four such names—*Дану (Dani)*, *Марму (Marti)*, *Нук (Niki)*, and *Тону (Toni)*—we believe that this is due to the limited amount of data analyzed. Diachronic observations (the presence of quite a few official gender-neutral names in the period 1890–1980), their extraordinary productivity in the present day, and the absence of administrative restrictions suggest that their number is potentially higher. There is absolutely nothing to prevent names such as *Аду (Adi)*, *Руми (Rumi)*, or *Мони (Moni)* from appearing as official names for both girls and boys, as they are currently in everyday practice.

Second, the increasing number of zero-ending feminine names has led to the appearance of homonymous forms with pre-existing masculine versions such as *Габриел (Gabriel)*, *Ивелин (Ivelin)*, and *Симон (Simon)*, and the emergence of new gender-neutral names. This process has already affected traditional Bulgarian girls' names, which has given us reason to separate these names as a specific *Розалин (Rozalin)* type. They are, without a doubt, a new phenomenon in Bulgarian language.

In general, it can be concluded that the adoption of foreign naming patterns through the influx of numerous unadapted foreign names has facilitated the appearance of gender-neutral names, as it has led to transformations in their traditional morphological-phonological structure. The tendency toward the loss of gender specificity of personal names is already present in the Bulgarian context, although still on the periphery of name lists, and it is a result of the internationalization of the Bulgarian anthroponomasticon as well as aspirations for keeping up with naming fashion trends in a broader context.

Notes

1. Transliteration of all Cyrillic examples is given in parentheses.
2. The Bulgarian language is an analytical language in terms of inflection. It has three grammatical genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, which are usually signified by their ending; e.g., a zero ending (or a word ending in a consonant) most often signifies masculine gender, *-a/ -я (-a/-ya)*—feminine, and *-o, -e, -u, -y (-o, -e, -i, -u)*—neuter. This is also true to a significant extent for personal names, where there is a correspondence between grammatical gender and natural gender, which is also expressed in the morphemic structure of the names themselves, more specifically in their endings.

3. In the modern Bulgarian language, the final morpheme at the end of the word/name, i.e., the morpheme *-a* (*-a*), is a lexicalized ending, because it preserves its inflectional functions in syntactic terms, and this is evident in the syntactic agreement by gender, which also occurs in attributive phrases such as *хубавата Елена* (*hubavata Elena*) 'the beautiful Elena' and predicative phrases such as *Мария е сресана* (*Mariya e sresana*) 'Maria is combed'.
4. Some ancient biblical names, borrowed from Greek, are an exception, such as *Илия* (*Iliya*), *Никола* (*Nikola*), *Сава* (*Sava*), *Тома* (*Toma*), and others.
5. The author uses the term 'unisex name' (Levkova, 2022:136).
6. In a recent publication on the subject, statistical analyses reveal that names with a zero ending given to girls comprise around 5% of all feminine names included in the study in 2008 (for details see Choleva-Dimitrova et al., 2024).
7. In the past, similar names were adapted: *Марсела* (*Marsela*) from Fr. *Marcelle*, *Дениза* (*Deniza*) from Fr. *Denise* (Ilchev, 2012).
8. *Абигейл* (*Abigeyl*) < *Abigail* where < denotes *from*.
9. Due to the regulations on the protection of personal data after 2010, the data now provided by the National Statistical Institute are limited to the names of newborns that are repeated more than two times in a given town. This significantly limits the scope of the data, as in some corpora, names with only one or two tokens comprise up to 50% of all newborn names (Kovachev, 1995:20). Considering that gender-neutral names are rare and are, in most cases, names of single or double token, this would make it impossible to study them. For comparison, in more recent data from 2018, from the eight largest cities in the country, only one single example was found of a name being used for both boys and girls.
10. 108M; 4F, where 108M denotes 108 occurrences of masculine names, and 4F denotes 4 occurrences of feminine names.
11. *Андрея* (*Andreya*) or *Андреа* (*Andrea*), *Денис* (*Denis*) or *Дениз* (*Deniz*), *Матей* (*Mateya*) or *Матейа* (*Matea*), and *Лилиан* (*Lilyan*) or *Лилиан* (*Lilian*) are spelling variants, hence they are regarded as one and the same name.
12. Previous studies in other personal name systems show that there are certain patterns in the use of given anthroponyms as gender neutral names. According to H. Barry and A. Harper, "names tend to evolve from masculine to unisex to feminine" (Barry & Harper, 1993:228). According to Lieberman, Dumais, and Bauman, certain names become androgynous in a parallel way, moving from different initial anthroponyms to the same unisex name, most often diminutive in origin (Lieberman et al., 2000:1267–1268).
13. The personal name *Deniz*, m./f., could also be Turkish (Tahir, 2004).
14. In the case of feminine variants, the spelling with *-a* (*-a*) is preferred, without iotation, i.e., *Андреа* (*Andrea*) and *Матейа* (*Matea*) instead of *Андрея* (*Andreya*) and *Матей* (*Mateya*).
15. This mechanism for forming male names from female names has been quite common in Bulgaria since the middle of the 20th century; see *Детелин* (*Detelin*) < *Детелина* (*Detelina*), *Лилиан* (*Lilyan*) < *Лилиана* (*Lilyana*), *Малин* (*Malin*) < *Малина* (*Malina*), *Цветелин* (*Tsvetelin*) < *Цветелина* (*Tsvetelina*), etc.

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Appendix: Transliteration of Cyrillic Characters into Latin Characters

а – a
б – b
в – v
г – g
д – d
е – e
ж – zh
з – z
и – i
й – y
к – k
л – l
м – m
н – n
о – o
п – p
р – r
с – s
т – t
у – u
ф – f
х – h
ц – ts
ч – ch
ш – sh
щ – sht
ъ – a
ь – y
ю – yu
я – ya

Emilia, Noah, or Charly? Current Developments of Boys', Girls' and Gender-Neutral Names in Germany and Other (European) Countries

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ABSTRACT: This study analyses the relationship between given names and gender in Germany and other (European) countries. To this end, the development and use of gender-neutral names in Germany is presented based on existing studies and my own new research and compared with the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, France, England/Wales, and the United States. It becomes clear that, despite progressive social changes to traditional gender role concepts, gender-neutral names are still a marginal phenomenon in Germany and other European countries analyzed. Current trends in German boys' and girls' names are then highlighted. It is noticeable that the names are converging phonologically. Similar developments, albeit at their own pace and with their own characteristics, can also be seen in the other countries analyzed. This phonological convergence of boys' and girls' names appears to be an alternative to gender-neutral names, with which parents are reacting to changing gender perceptions and reducing gender-specific labelling in naming.

KEYWORDS: gender-neutral names, German names, European names, names and gender, degendering of names

Introduction

As Alford (1988) has already noted, given names reveal much about the societies and cultures in which they are given. He was able to determine that 85% of the societies he studied considered a person's sex so important that they mark it on the given name. As a result, 'the sex of a named person is one of the most common pieces of information contained in a given name' (Alford, 1988, p. 65). Only recently has there been research on how names and gender are connected in Germany and other European countries (cf. for Germany e.g., Oelkers, 2003; Nübling & Hirschauer, 2018; Schmidt-Jüngst, 2020; for Europe Ackermann and Zimmer, 2021). On the basis of some of these studies and my own original research,

an overview of the connections and developments on the topic will be given below. First, German name law will be briefly outlined and the development and use of gender-neutral names will be presented. Then similarities and differences to gender-neutral names in other European countries and the United States will be listed. The second part will focus on the recent development of German given names and show current trends in boys' and girls' names. In these current developments, it can be argued that parents are finding ways to opt for less gender-specific naming without choosing gender-neutral names. Here, a comparative look into the current naming practices of other countries will also be taken.

German Naming Law and Gender-Neutral Names

Emilia, *Sophia*, *Noah*, and *Mateo* have been the most popular baby names in Germany for years and show that there are some given names that are particularly popular.¹ At the same time, however, these name statistics also show that the frequencies for these top names have been decreasing for years and that names are becoming more diverse.² This is because most parents are looking for a very individual name for their offspring. Therefore, old names (e.g., *Theodor*, *Karl*, *Erwin*, *Paul*) are revived, names from other languages, often from English (e.g., *Kimberley*, *Hailey*, *Colin*, *Jayden*), are adapted, or new names are created (e.g., *Dariane* from *Daria* and *Ariane*, *Mirle* from *Merle* with vowel changes). Well-known names are also often 'jazzed up' with unusual spellings: *Kevin* with a double *n* and *LouAnn* with an inserted majuscule (cf. Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, 2023; Bielefeld, 2023). It is striking, however, that despite all creativity and all striving for individuality, one onymic boundary is almost never crossed in Germany: that is, the boundary between boys' and girls' names.³ German name law plays an important role here. Although the subject of 'naming' is not addressed in the Civil Code of the Federal Republic of Germany and there is, therefore, no legal regulation,⁴ certain guidelines have developed over time from customary and judicial law. These are summarized in an administrative regulation in 1980 (Deutsche Bundesregierung, 2014). It serves as a guideline for the approval of a name for all registrars in Germany who are entrusted with the registration of births and, thus, with the registration of given names.⁵

This administrative regulation stipulates that the given name chosen must:

- (1) not be offensive (i.e., not be detrimental to the child's welfare, as could be the case with derogatory names or names with negative connotations),
- (2) be a given name by its nature (i.e., cannot be a family name or a title such as *Lord* or *Princess*), and
- (3) that only masculine given names are permissible for boys/men and only feminine given names are permissible for girls/women.⁶

This regulation resulted in two strictly separate name inventories prevailing in Germany: one for males and one for females. Ambiguous names were not permitted. This did not change until 1997, the year of a court case in which the judge ultimately ruled that names that do not clearly indicate gender must be allowed if a 'clearly identifying given name is added'⁷ to them. Since then, gender-neutral names have been allowed in combination with a second, gender-identifying name. In 2008, a different court ruled that from now on, gender-neutral names may also be given alone, without the addition of an unambiguously feminine or unambiguously masculine name.⁸ Thus, it is not possible in Germany to give girls' names to boys and boys' names to girls. But for almost three decades (since 1997), gender-neutral names have been allowed, and since 2008, they have been allowed to be given without a second name, indicating the gender. Nevertheless, this option is hardly used by German parents (Schmuck, 2019, p. 151). In the following, I will take a closer look at the specific statistics and developments of gender-neutral names.

Gender-Neutral Names in Germany

Since there are no official name statistics in Germany, the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache* (GfdS) and Knud Bielefeld, a private name researcher, try to collect and evaluate as many given names as possible via the registry offices and hospitals every year.⁹ Schmuck (2018 and 2019) was one of the first to examine gender-neutral names in Germany from the top 1,000 names lists for boys and girls of 2014 using data from Bielefeld (2023). She identified 18 names that were given to both genders. It turns out that only 3% of all newborns received one of these gender-neutral names. In further analysis, she found that the numbers are even lower, as only 3 names were given to boys and girls in a balanced way (cf. Figure 1). The other 15 names all showed dominance as either girls' or boys' names in various gradations.¹⁰ As Figure 1 shows, though, mostly boys' names are chosen that are also given to girls. There are only a few girls' names that parents also give to boys.¹¹

German parents seem to have been no friends of gender-neutral names in 2014. But how does it look today? Has anything changed in the meantime?

To determine this, I compared the top 1,000 given names¹² from 2017, 2020, and 2022. I analyzed the names given to both genders using Schmuck's (2018 and 2019) model. However, some modifications and extensions to the analyses were made, particularly in the data area and in the categorization of the degree of mixing. I do not use Bielefeld's Top 1,000, which captures about 25% of the names of a birth cohort, as the data basis, but the Top 1,000 of the GfdS, which captures between 82 and 86% of the names of a birth cohort, depending on the year. These data were not available to Schmuck (2018 and 2019) at the time, as the GfdS has

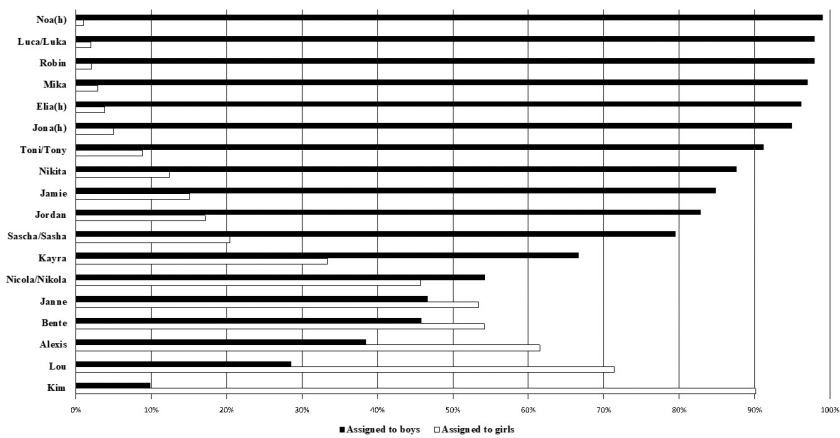


Figure 1: Names admitted for both genders in Germany and their distribution, 2014. Based on data of Schmuck (2019), own figure.

only been recording first and second names separately since 2017. Bielefeld (2023) already did this separation for the 2014 data. Regarding the categorization of the degree of mixing, Schmuck already shows a refinement from 2018 to 2019. In the present study, I have again made a smaller categorization in 10% of steps to make the gradations between the degrees of mixing even more visible (cf. Table 1). I also did some additional analyses, such as the gender-neutrality-index (cf. Figure 2).

The results show that gender-neutral names are still a fringe phenomenon in Germany. The proportion of children with gender-neutral names increased only slightly from 2014 to 2022 (cf. Figure 2).

As in Schmuck’s 2014 data, even fewer names are assigned in a balanced way in subsequent years. In 2022, for instance, only two names, *Janne* and *Esra/Ezra*, are assigned in a balanced way, most of the names used as gender-neutral are again boys’ names (cf. Figure 3).

Classification in %	Mixing
40–50%	gender neutral (= balanced)
30–39%	strongly ambiguous
20–29%	ambiguous
10–19%	slightly ambiguous
0–9%	not ambiguous

Table 1: The Classification of the Degree of Mixing, Based on Schmuck (2018 and 2019) but with Some Changes

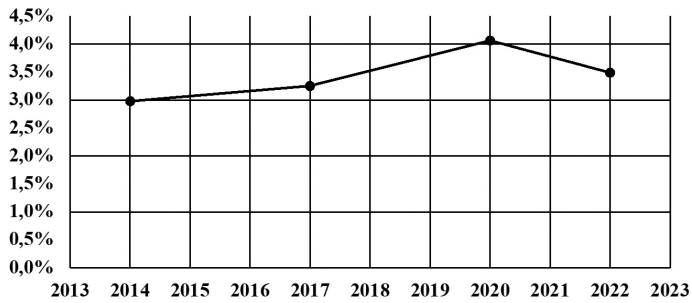


Figure 2: Proportion of Newborns in Germany with Gender-Neutral Names, 2014–2022 (all overlaps in the top 1,000 names lists).

In Schmuck’s and other studies, it has proven useful to apply a degree of mixing of at least 10% in the opposite sex and a frequency threshold of at least 0.05% name evidence within a birth cohort and to define only names that meet these criteria as gender-neutral names. The background is that names must also have a certain degree of recognition within society to be perceived as a boy’s, girl’s or gender-neutral name (cf. Schmuck, 2018, p. 274). Considering the frequency threshold and the minimum mixing ratio, the names for 2022 are reduced to only 3 names: only *Lou*, *Toni/y*, and *Charlie/y* are also assigned to the opposite sex at a rate of at least 10% and were assigned to at least 0.05% of the birth cohort (= at least 343 newborns).

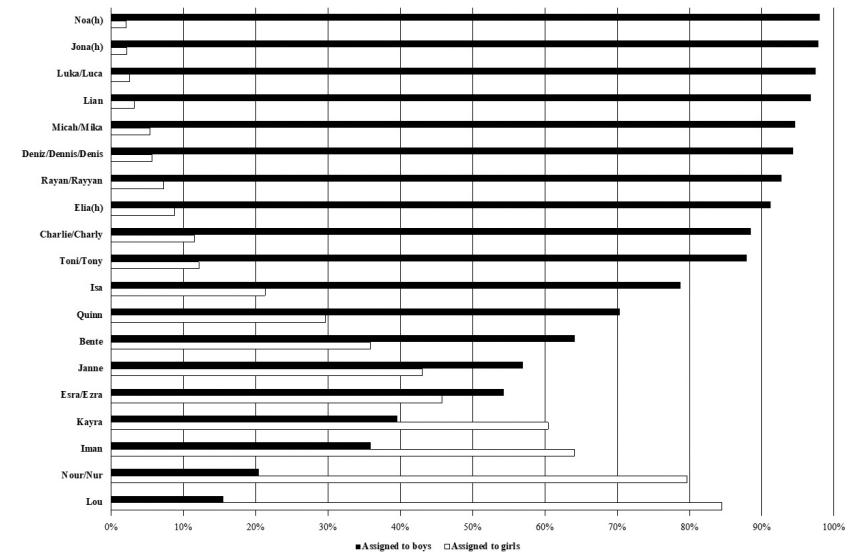


Figure 3: Names Admitted for Both Genders in Germany and their Distribution, 2022.

	Name	Assigned to girls	Assigned to boys	% of birth cohort	Mixing
		% of names	% of names		
Overlapping of names in the top 1,000, over 10% mixing and from a frequency threshold of 0.05%					
1	Lou	84.50%	15.50%	0.07%	Slightly ambiguous
2	Toni/Tony	12.10%	87.90%	0.20%	Slightly ambiguous
3	Charlie/Charly	11.50%	88.50%	0.09%	Slightly ambiguous
Mixing under 10%					
4	Elia(h)	8.70%	91.30%	0.10%	Not ambiguous
5	Rayan/Rayyan	7.20%	92.80%	0.10%	Not ambiguous
6	Deniz/Dennis/Denis	5.70%	94.30%	0.08%	Not ambiguous
7	Micah/Mika	5.40%	94.60%	0.22%	Not ambiguous
8	Lian	3.20%	96.80%	0.16%	Not ambiguous
9	Luka/Luca	2.60%	97.40%	0.54%	Not ambiguous
10	Jona/Jonah	2.10%	97.90%	0.37%	Not ambiguous
11	Noah/Noa	2.00%	98.00%	0.74%	Not ambiguous
Low frequency range (under 0.05% of the birth cohort)					
12	Nour/Nur	79.60%	20.40%	0.03%	Ambiguous
13	Iman	64.10%	35.90%	0.02%	Strongly ambiguous
14	Kayra	60.50%	39.50%	0.01%	Strongly ambiguous
15	Esra/Ezra	45.80%	54.20%	0.02%	Gender neutral in a balanced way
16	Janne	43.10%	56.90%	0.04%	Gender neutral in a balanced way
17	Bente	35.90%	64.10%	0.01%	Strongly ambiguous
18	Quinn	29.60%	70.40%	0.02%	Ambiguous
19	Isa	21.30%	78.70%	0.05%	Ambiguous

Table 2: Names Given to Both Genders in 2022, Sorted by Being Above the Frequency Threshold of 0.05% and Having a Degree of Mixing of at Least 10%, and Names that Do Not Meet These Criteria (Mixing Under 10%; Low Frequency Range)

Those names that meet these criteria I will define as gender-neutral names in the strict sense. By gender-neutral names in the broad sense, I mean all the names that overlap in the top 1,000 of boys' and girls' names and, thus, basically occur as names for both sexes. This classification makes it clear that most of the gender-neutral names in the strict sense usually have only a low degree of mixing (cf. Table 2). There are significantly higher degrees of mixing for names in the low frequency range. Also, the only two names, *Janne* and *Esra/Ezra*, that were given in a balanced way are in the low frequency range.

To verify this, I calculated the gender-neutrality-index for each name, according to Bloothoof (2021). This index is calculated based on the name evidence for boys and girls and indicates on a scale of 0 to 1 how gender-neutral a name is assigned. The 0 stands for gender-specific, the 1 for gender-neutral.¹³ I have combined this index with the frequency within the birth cohort for each name (cf.

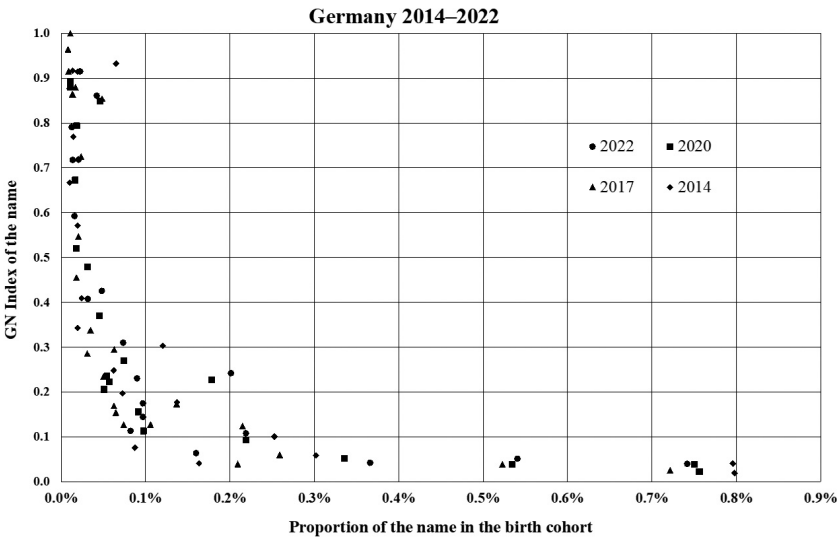


Figure 4: Gender neutrality index (Bloothoof, 2021) combined with the proportion of the name in the birth cohort, Germany 2014–2022.

Figure 4). It is clear that the names with a high gender-neutrality index are only in the low frequency range in all 4 years. The more often a name is assigned, the more gendered it becomes.

Next, I will take a closer look at the linguistic origins of the gender-neutral names in a broad sense. For this purpose, I determined the origin of all names given to both boys and girls over the 4 years (2014, 2017, 2020, and 2022). The analyses show that the names are very international (cf. Figure 5).

Most of the names come from Turkish and Arabic (e.g., *Rayan* and *Nour*). These are followed by names that are common in various languages, including German (e.g., *Isa* and *Toni/y*). These are mostly short forms. The third largest category is Anglo-American gender-neutral names, such as *Charly* and *Jordan*. Almost as many gender-neutral names come from Italian (e.g., *Luca* and *Elia*), and from Hebrew (e.g., *Noa(h)* and *Jona(h)*). As a separate category, I have combined the Low German/Frisian names. They are actually part of the German names, but they differ from them in that, unlike short forms like *Toni/y*, they only occur in a very specific region of Germany. As Figures 6 to 8 show, the gender-neutral name *Toni/y* is found all over Germany, but Low German/Frisian names like *Bente* are found only or mainly in northern Germany, where Frisian/Low German is also native.¹⁴ Interestingly, a detailed look at the regional distribution of the gender-neutral name *Bente* shows that in one part of Friesland it is mainly used as a boy's name, namely in East Friesland and Friesland, which roughly

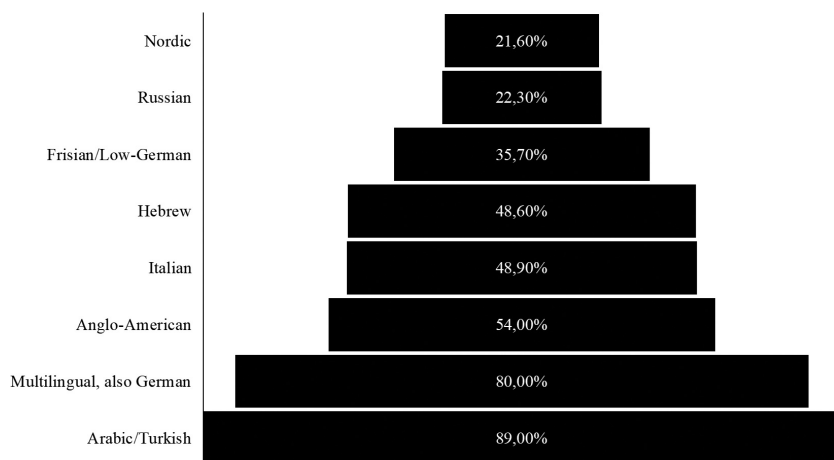


Figure 5: The linguistic origins of all gender-neutral names in the broad sense from 2014, 2017, 2020, and 2020 in Germany.

corresponds to the federal state of Lower Saxony. In North Friesland (federal state Schleswig-Holstein), on the other hand, *Bente* is mainly used as a girl's name. The regionally different use of the name subsequently enables a gender-specific assignment of the name *Bente* again. The last two categories of linguistic origin are Russian, with names like *Nikita* and *Sascha*, and the Nordic languages, from which gender-neutral names like *Mika* come.

If analyzing the linguistic origin of the names for each year individually and comparing them over time, a clear development can be seen.

The donor languages change over time (cf. Figure 9). In 2014, gender-neutral names come from a variety of languages ranging from 5% to just under 20%, such as Russian, Hebrew, and Italian. Russian, however, is declining over time and has disappeared by 2022. Arabic/Turkish, on the other hand, rises from just 5% in 2014 to more than 30% in 2022, making up the majority of gender-neutral names. This is a nice proof of how strongly names can also reflect current socio-political developments.

In a next step I analyzed the spelling of the names, because more than half of the German gender-neutral names in the broad sense show spelling variants. It turns out that a large part of the spelling variants consists of a certain spelling for girls' names and a certain spelling for boys' names. In 2022, 82% of spelling variants show such gender specificity. This means that a large proportion of gender-neutral names in Germany sound the same but are not spelt the same (cf. Table 3).

On the basis of the analyses presented, it was possible to highlight a few concise characteristics of gender-neutral names in Germany. Essentially, it was shown that



Figure 6: Distribution of the given name *Toni* in Germany. The darker the color, the more frequently the name is used in this federal state. Map based on all newborns from 2008 to 2022 with the name *Toni*. Source: Bielefeld (2023).

gender-neutral names are still chosen by only a few parents, that they are given in a balanced way mainly in the low-frequency range, that their linguistic origin is very international, and that many gender-neutral names sound the same but are spelled differently as boys’ and girls’ names.

The question arises whether only the gender-neutral names in Germany behave in this way or whether they have similar characteristics in other countries. To find answers, some of the points for the same period are examined for names in the Netherlands, Denmark, France, England/Wales, Norway, and the United States.

Gender-Neutral Names in Other European Countries and in the United States

The selection of these countries had to be made primarily on practical grounds. The decisive factor here was that comparable name data for the European countries

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Figure 7: Distribution of the boys’ name *Bente* in Germany (most popular in Lower Saxony). Map based on all newborns from 2008 to 2022 with the name *Bente*. Source: Bielefeld (2023).

Gender-neutral names and their spelling for	
girls	boys
Noa (mostly)*	Noah (mostly)*
Toni	Tony/Toni
Charlie	Charly/Charlie
Elia	Elijah/Elia
Rayan	Rayyan/Rayan
Jona (mostly)	Jonah/Jona
Deniz	Deniz/Denis/Dennis
Mika	Micah/Mika
Ezra	Esra
*Only rare evidence for opposite gender spelling. According to Frauke Rüdebusch (GfdS), these are probably errors in the gender assignment in the registry office.	

Table 3: Examples for Gender-Neutral Names and their Spelling Variants for Girls and Boys in the German Data from 2022



Figure 8: Distribution of the girls' name *Bente* in Germany (most popular in Schleswig-Holstein). Map based on all newborns from 2008 to 2022 with the name *Bente*. Source: Bielefeld (2023).

of the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, France, and England/Wales were made available to me either by the respective national statistical authorities, via publicly accessible name statistics on the corresponding national government home pages or via the Netherlands Meertens-Institute¹⁵ (cf. Figures 10 to 14). Since Anglo-American names are a significant contribution to first names in Germany, I have added the United States to the comparison of otherwise European countries. Together with Germany, I can compare the names of seven different countries below. I had a total of 18.08 million names at my disposal, resulting from the top 1,000 boys' and girls' names of Germany, the Netherlands, England/Wales, France, and the United States. As Norway is a very small country, only the top 500 could be collected, because there are not that many births there. The situation is similar in Denmark. Here, the names from the top 700 to 900 are available depending on the year. For England/Wales the name data pool of 2022 had to be replaced by the name

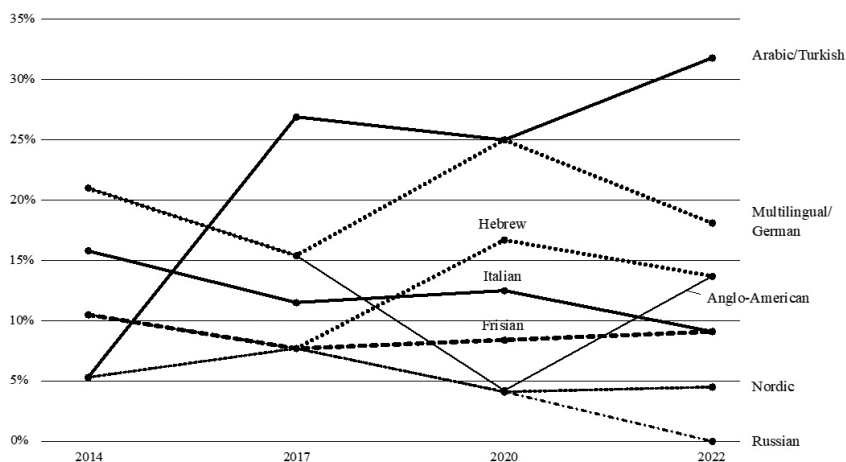


Figure 9: Linguistic origins of the gender-neutral names (in a broad sense) in Germany. The sharp drop in Russian names and the increase in Arabic/Turkish names are noticeable.

data pool of 2021, because the top 1,000 of 2022 have not been announced yet. Again, for each country, I compared the names in the boys' and girls' names lists for overlap, first identifying the respective gender-neutral names in a broad sense. This was followed by consideration of the frequency threshold and the minimum degree of mixing to filter out the gender-neutral names in the strict sense.

The analyses show gender-neutral names are used even less in Denmark and especially in Norway than in Germany. France, England/Wales, the Netherlands,

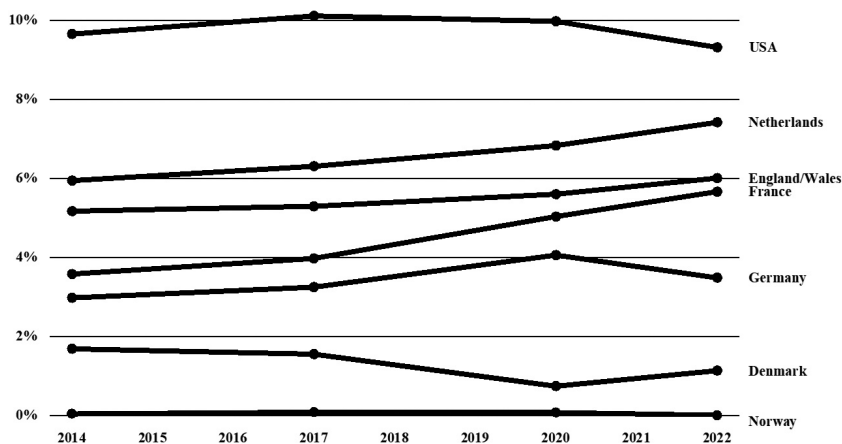


Figure 10: Frequency of gender-neutral names (in a broad sense) in seven different countries from 2014 to 2022.

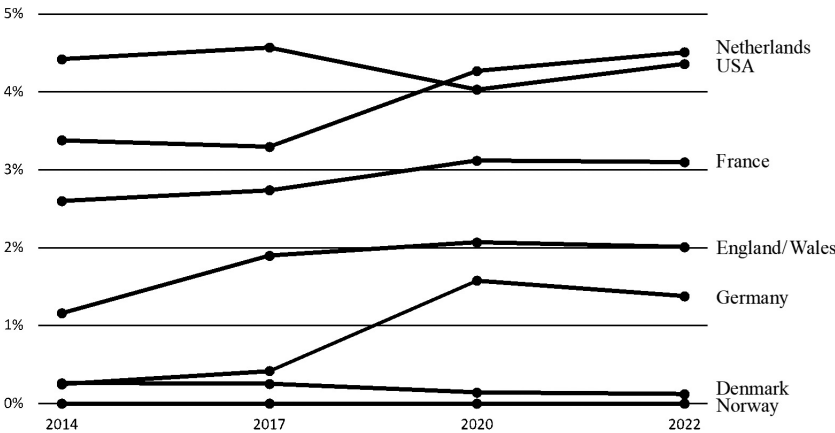


Figure 11: Frequency of gender-neutral names (in the strict sense) in seven different countries from 2014 to 2022.

and the United States, nevertheless, all have more gender-neutral names. Although the difference to England/Wales and France may seem small at first glance, in 2022, there were 40% more children with gender-neutral names in England/Wales and even 60% more gender-neutral names in France than in Germany. The difference to the Netherlands is already clear in the graph. In all years, there are about twice as many names as in Germany. This is topped by the United States, which has the most gender-neutral names of all countries in its inventory. Compared to Germany, there are almost 3 times as many.

If I consider only the gender-neutral names in the strict sense, this reduces the names in all countries, as expected. However, not to the same extent. Whereas

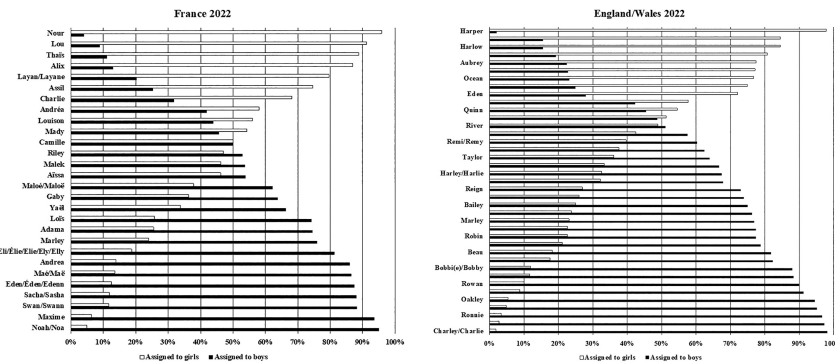


Figure 12: Names admitted for both genders and their distribution in France and England/Wales, 2022.

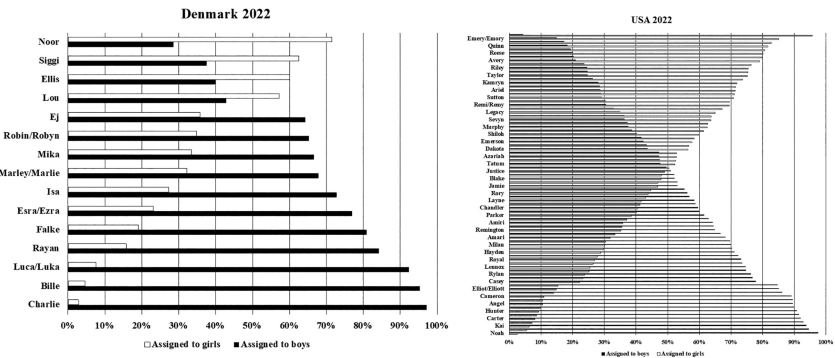


Figure 13: Names admitted for both genders and their distribution in Denmark and United States, 2022.

France and England/Wales were close to each other before, the gap has now widened because France has significantly more gender-neutral names in the strict sense. But I see the biggest change in the United States and the Netherlands. Gender-neutral names in the United States are down from 2020 and 2022. In the

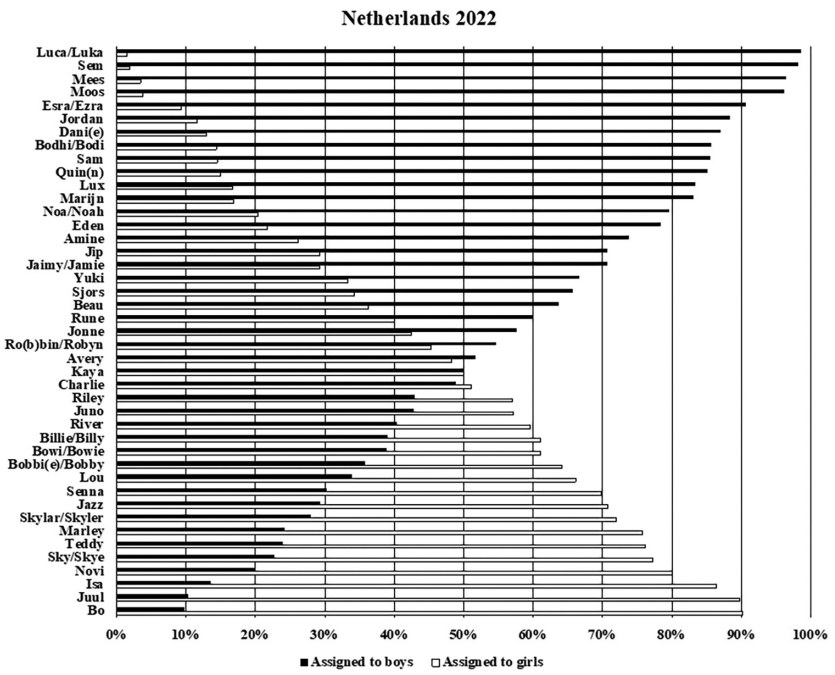


Figure 14: Names admitted for both genders and their distribution in the Netherlands, 2022.

Netherlands, on the other hand, they have increased by 50% in those years. The Netherlands is therefore the country with the most gender-neutral names in 2020 and 2022.

In the next analyses, I took a closer look at the degree of mixing in each country, to see whether boys' names were also predominantly given as gender-neutral names, as was the case in Germany.

The situation is very similar in France and England/Wales. Again, more boys' names are given to girls than vice versa. This is the case in all 4 years studied. The same picture can be seen in Denmark, but even more intensified. Here, 2022 is the first year, that boys' names are not exclusively used as gender-neutral names. In the United States, this distribution is not as pronounced. It is equalizing more and more from 2014 to 2022. 'In other words, there are still more girls named Charlie than boys named Sue' (Zhang, 2023)—but the ratios are getting closer and closer.

The most balanced situation, however, is in the Netherlands. Here, boys' and girls' names are used almost equally, as sources for gender-neutral names in all time periods.

Bloothoof and Onland's (2018) analysis of the extensive Dutch name data from 1880 to 2015 is consistent with this finding. It shows that the proportion of women and men in the Netherlands with gender-neutral names has always been very close (cf. Figure 15).

I then calculated the gender-neutrality-index according to Bloothoof (2021) for all gender-neutral names from the different countries and again combined it with the frequency in the birth cohort (cf. Figure 16).

In most countries, balanced gender-neutral names are found only in the low frequency range, similar to Germany. For each country, however, it is possible to determine a slightly different frequency threshold, or one could say tolerance threshold, above which the names become less gender-neutral.

In addition to the country-specific threshold, it can be observed, that some countries also have country-specific outliers. Such outliers are names that are frequently assigned and still have a high gender-neutrality-index. This is particularly the case in France and the Netherlands (cf. Figure 17).

These are names that either already have a longer country-specific tradition as gender-neutral names, such as *Camille* in France, or that have established a gender-specific spelling. For example, the name *Andreá/Andrea* in France is given with an accent to women and without an accent to men. The English short name *Charlie/y* is used in France almost exclusively in the spelling with *-ie* for women and predominantly with *-y* spelling for men.¹⁷ The same applies to the outlier *Noa(h)* in the Netherlands. It too has a gender-specific spelling with *-h* for boys and one

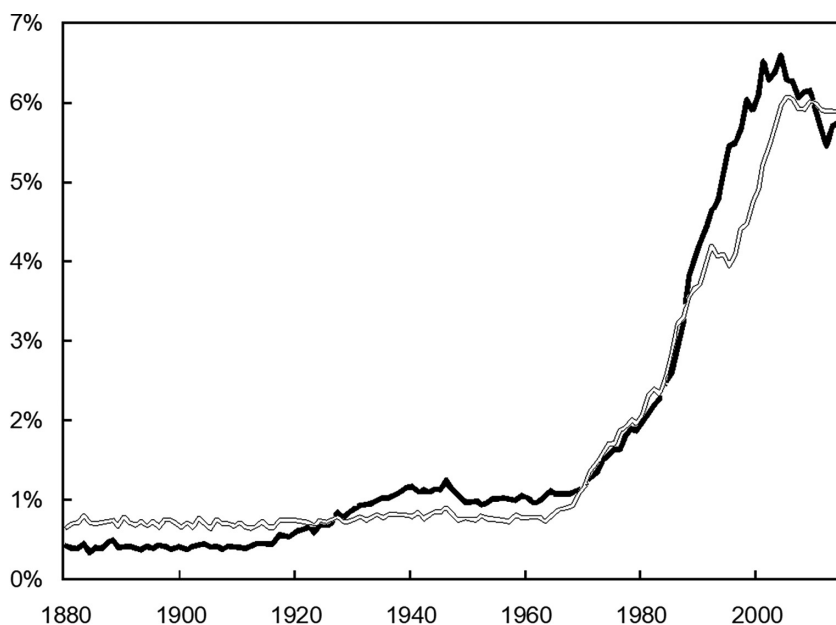


Figure 15: Percentage of women (black) and men (white) with gender-neutral names in the Netherlands.

Source. Bloothoof and Onland (2018)¹⁶.

without *-h* for girls. These gender-specific spellings, thus, seem to be one reason why the names still show up with a balanced distribution of boys and girls, even in the higher frequency range.¹⁸

Despite the country-specific outliers, however, we see overall that gender-neutral names tend to play a small role in naming in all seven countries studied. This leads to the question of how gender can be marked on names at all, and whether there might be ways other than gender-neutral names that a society could use to express its desire for less gendered naming.

Gender Marking of Names

There are three different principles to mark gender on a name:

1. One can express gender via semantics and, thus, create so-called 'speaking names'. Examples of this are the old Germanic names, as well as the names in Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, and Turkish. Here, gender is usually assigned via gender stereotypes. In Turkish, for example, women's names describe gentleness, beauty, flowers, or smells. Men's names come from the semantic fields for strength, courage, or predators. However, there

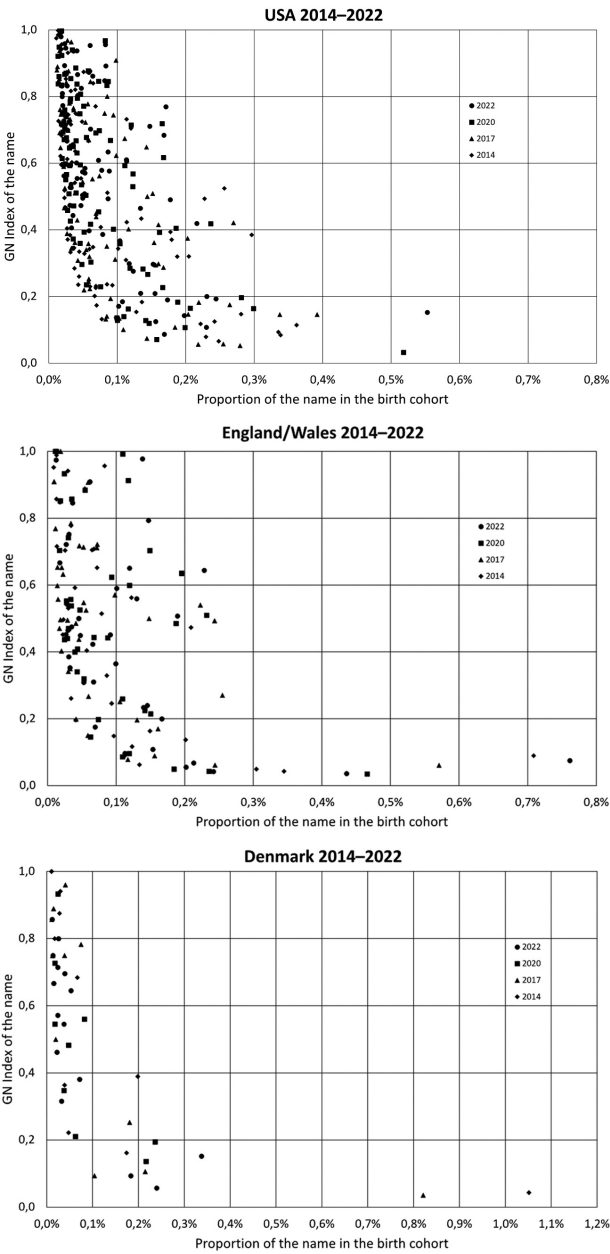


Figure 16: Gender-neutrality-index (Bloothoof, 2021) combined with the frequency in the birth cohort. Examples for the United States, England/Wales, and Denmark, 2014–2022.

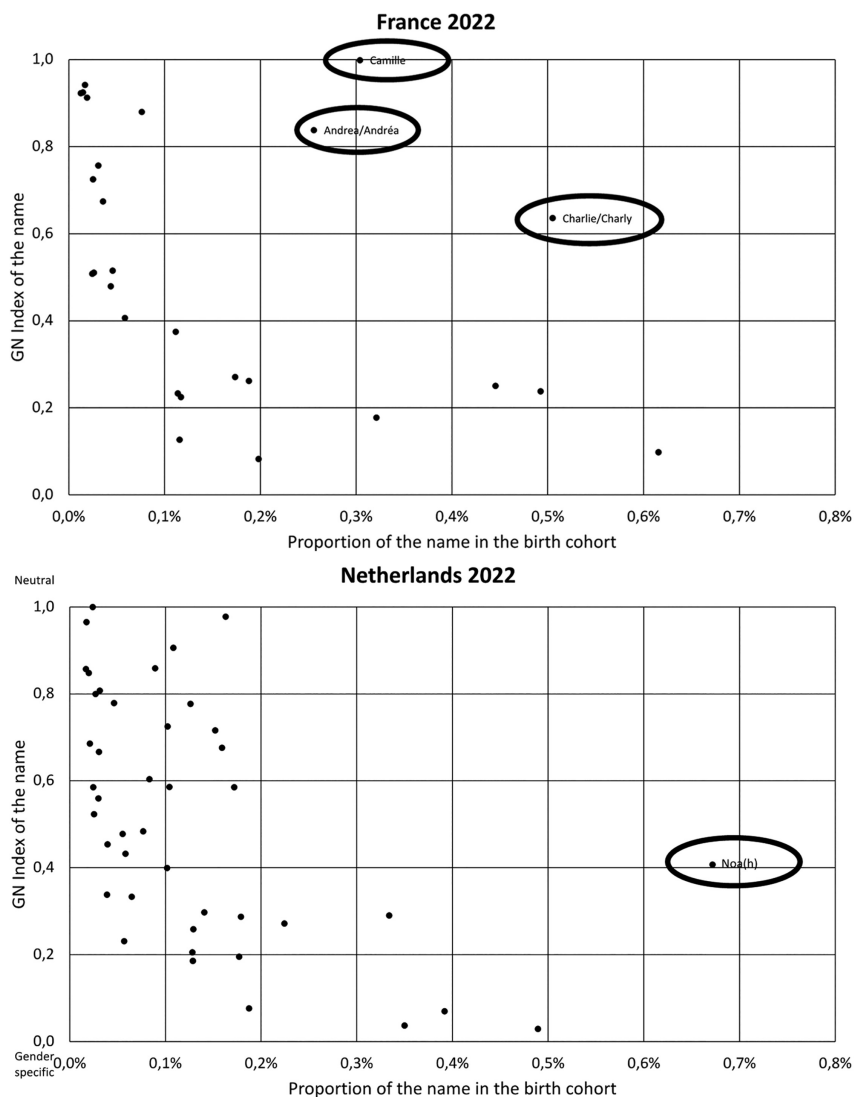


Figure 17: Examples for outliers in France and the Netherlands, 2022.

are also some names for both sexes. These mostly originate from neutral nature terms for sun, light, or the sea (cf. Nübling and Kotthoff, 2018, p. 195; Schmuck, 2019, p. 137f).

- Gender can be indicated formally, e.g., by certain endings on the name body. Italian applies this formal principle: 95% of Italian women's names end

in *-a* (e.g., *Claudia*), 77% of men's names end in *-o* (e.g., *Claudio*). Furthermore, many European languages use the formal principle to derive female names from male names by adding certain gender-exclusive suffixes:

- * In German, the suffix *-ina/-ine* forms the female name *Wilhelmina/Wilhelmine* from *Wilhelm*, *-e* or *-a* forms the female name *Christiane/Christina* from *Christian*.
- * In French, *-iette*, *-ine* and *-e* change male names such as *Antoine*, *Paul*, and *Augustin* to the female *Antoinette*, *Pauline*, and *Augustine*.
- * In Dutch, the suffixes *-je* and *-tje* change the masculine *Hendrik* and *Jan* into the feminine *Henrikje* and *Jantje*.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that the opposite, a man's name being formed from a woman's name, almost never happens.

3. The third and final principle is the conventional principle. It is the most used worldwide (Alford, 1988, p. 66). Here, gender cannot be recognized semantically or formally but must be learned as part of cultural knowledge.

In German, too, the conventional principle is the most widely used today.²⁰ However, some names also use the formal principle. Nevertheless, this has not always been the case. In language history, German, with its Germanic names, first had a semantically motivated name inventory. Over the centuries, a name inventory of a conventional and formal nature developed (cf. Nübling & Kotthoff, 2018, p. 195). Around the 10th century, the formal principle began to disappear. On the way from Old High German to Middle High German, the so-called reduction of unstressed syllables took place. That is, all unstressed full vowels were weakened to the schwa-sound [ə]. As a result, all name endings, that had previously indicated gender, were also changed to the uniform *-e* [ə]. Then something happened that is considered a linguistic–historical sensation in the development of German: the phonological gender boundary of given names was repaired—presumably following the Latin model—‘by restoring full suffix vowels exclusively to given names (and not to appellatives)’ (Nübling, 2019, p. 119). Names like *Otte* and *Eve* became *Otto* and *Eva*—and the gender assignment via the ending was restored. This also explains why, to this day, German names ending in *-o* have a masculine connotation and names ending in *-a* a feminine one. In addition, many girls' names in German are derived from boys' names by adding *-a*, and many originate from other languages. As a result, they are longer and have a different stress than boys' names.

Feature	Female given names	Male given names
Syllable count	2, 54%	1, 92%
Main accent	First syllable: 67%	First syllable: 90%
Vowel/consonant share	More vowels	More consonants
Ending sound	On vowel: 78.5%	On consonant: 81%

Table based on Nübling (2018, p. 243).

Table 4: Most Important Phonological Differences of the 100 Most Frequent Female and Male Given Names of the Currently Living Population in Germany

This is how it happens, that in today's German, we not only have two separate sets of names for men and women, but that these sets of names also have different linguistic characteristics: Women's names are mostly noninitially stressed, longer than men's names, and end in a vowel. Men's names, on the other hand, tend to be shorter, stressed on the first syllable, and end in consonants (cf. Table 4).²¹

Even if very few people are aware of these linguistic structural differences between male and female names, they are so internalized that people are usually able to immediately recognize an unfamiliar name as a woman's or man's name. Gerhards (2003) conducted such tests more than 10 years ago and found a high accuracy rate. There are also studies on Anglo-American names (Lieberson & Mikelson, 1995; Fredrickson, 2007) and on names from some other countries (e.g., France, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Poland, Spain, Denmark, and others in Ackermann and Zimmer, 2021), which show that such linguistic structural differences in the name inventory also exist in other languages (albeit to varying degrees).

Current Developments of Names

Nübling (2009) not only examined the 100 most common male and female names of the current living population in Germany but also analyzed the most common names in Germany separately by decades. This examination of names from 1945 to 2015 shows that the differences in linguistic structure were significantly greater more than 75 years ago and have converged over the decades. Nübling also determined that the length of boys' and girls' names is continuously moving toward each other. Girls' names have become shorter over time, while boys' names have become longer. Names have also converged in terms of accent position and vowel share. More and more girls' names have an accent on the first syllable, and more and more boys' names contain a larger proportion of vowels (Nübling, 2009).

This development begins after World War II, at a time when major social changes can also be seen in Germany. These changes also include that the traditional gender roles are transforming and aligning. This is reflected in a linguistic

structural decline in the relevance of gender markers in names, which begins slowly after 1945, picks up speed in the 1960s and 1970s, continues with the 1980s, and gains momentum again with the transition to the 21st century. Indeed, in 2000, for the first time among the top 10 boys' names, a name with the suffix *-a* appears: *Luca*. Whereas the ending *-a* was previously regarded as the most exclusive marker of femininity, more and more boys' names with this ending have been appearing since 2000 and have also made it into the Top 10. They are names like *Noah*, *Jonah*, *Mika*, *Joshua*, and *Elia*. And they not only end (phonologically) in *-a*, but they also contain more and more vowel sounds, in some cases even more vowel sounds than consonant sounds, as in *Noah* and *Elijah*. This also used to be a characteristic of female names.

The implication is that since gender-opposite names are not allowed in Germany and gender-neutral names are not very popular, a trend is developing, that breaks down the strict onymic gender segregation in another way. It is a development that Nübling and Kotthoff (2018) describes as the 'similarization' of female and male names, resulting in 'an onymic degendering behind the scenes' (Nübling & Kotthoff, 2018, p. 198) through their phonetic components.

Looking at the current top lists of some other countries, it seems that the phonological convergence of boys' and girls' names is not just a trend in Germany. The convergence may even be further advanced. There are already phonologically similar boys' and girls' names in the top 20 of many countries, such as *Mila* and *Milan* or *Luna* and *Luca* in the Netherlands, *Wilma* and *William* or *Olivia* and *Oliver* in Sweden, also *Olivia* and *Oliver* in England/Wales, and in France *Louise* and *Louis*, as well as *Lina* and *Lena*, which have many similarities to *Liam* and *Leon* on the boys' list. To verify this impression, we transcribed the top 100 from 2014 and 2022 from Germany and from the Netherlands, England/Wales, France, and Sweden, annotated selected linguistic features, analyzed them, and compared them with each other.²²

In fact, the differences between boys' and girls' names are greatest in Germany. In the other countries surveyed, there is already (in some cases significantly) greater convergence. While in Germany, girls' names are, on average, 0.4 syllables longer than boys' names, in the Netherlands, Sweden, England/Wales, and France, not only are the differences smaller, but in France, boys' and girls' names are almost the same length (cf. Figure 17). This balance between boys' and girls' names in France is also reflected in other linguistic features: the proportion of vowel and consonant ending sounds in boys' names is also almost equal, and girls' names also have values that are much closer to each other than in the other countries (cf. Figure 18). The proportions of vowel and consonant sounds in the entire boys' and girls' names are also much closer than in the other countries (cf. Figures 19 and 20). The Netherlands, England/Wales, and Sweden lie between the two extremes of

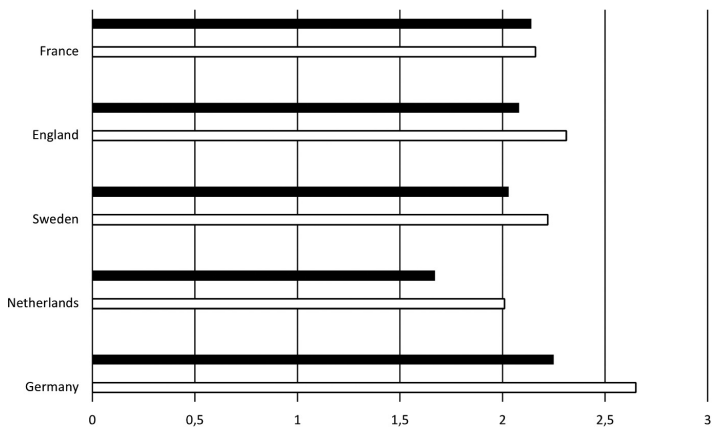


Figure 18: Average number of syllables for boys’ and girls’ names in the top 100 of 2022. Boys are denoted by solid symbols, and girls are denoted by open symbols.

Germany (large difference) and France (same or similar distribution). A look at the distribution of vowels and consonants in the entire body of the name again shows a similar distribution for France. However, the distribution is even more similar for girls’ names in Sweden and the Netherlands. The girls’ names in Germany and England/Wales contain more vowel sounds than consonant sounds, while the boys’

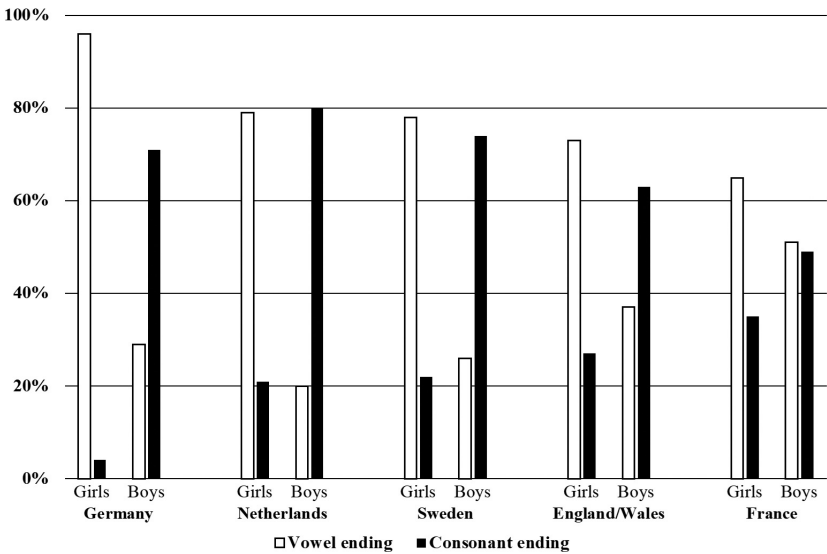


Figure 19: Proportion of vowel and consonant ending sounds in the boys’ and girls’ names in the top 100 of 2022.

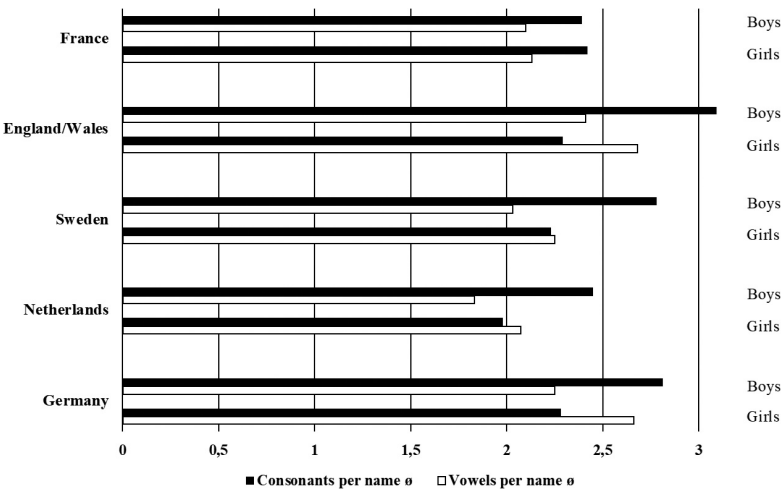


Figure 20: Proportion of vowel and consonant sounds in the entire name, top 100 of 2022.

names in these two countries and in Sweden and the Netherlands are dominated by consonant sounds.

A comparison over time from 2014 to 2022 for Germany shows that boys' names have moved closer to girls' names in all linguistic characteristics: in 2022, they have a higher average number of syllables, more vowel endings, and also a higher proportion of vowels in the total name body. However, this is a one-sided approximation: girls' names do not develop toward boys' names, but also have more syllables, more vowel endings, and more vowels in the name body—thus, strengthening their 'feminine characteristics'. There is a similar, but not quite as pronounced, development in England/Wales. Here, too, a chronological comparison shows a parallel development of boys' and girls' names: both become longer and have more vowels in the name body and pronunciation (cf. Figures 21, 22 and 23).

In France, on the other hand, the similarity of girls' and boys' names has increased in two of the three characteristics from 2014 to 2022 and that they are now almost identical. However, the small differences between boys' and girls' names in the Netherlands increase slightly from 2014 to 2022. Overall, however, there is a tendency for boys' and girls' names to converge in most countries, or a convergence has already taken place, particularly in the case of boys' names.

These findings apply only to the time period selected here, 2014 and 2022. A longer time period would be needed to determine how the linguistic structures of girls' and boys' names have developed in recent decades. Since name corpora for larger periods are only available for a few countries, a diachronic look can only be

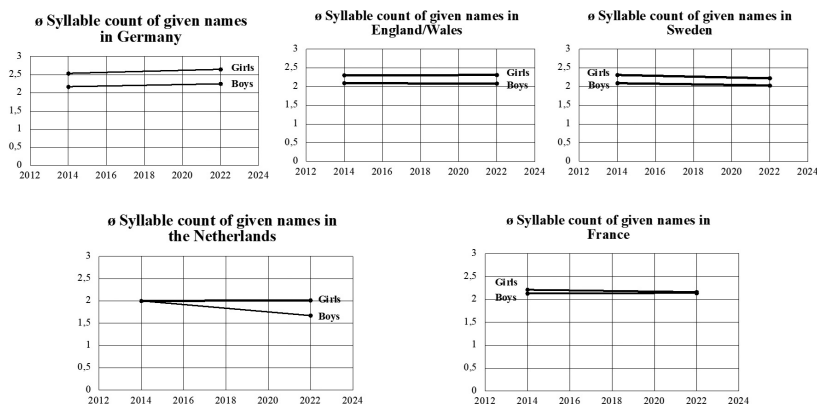


Figure 21: Average syllable count of boys' and girls' names in five different countries, top 100 of 2014 and 2022.

taken here at the Netherlands. As an example, this will be done for the development of the vocalic final sounds of boys' and girls' names. Such an investigation has been carried out by Bloothoof and Onland (2023) for given names from 1790 to 2017. It shows that over the entire period, only 15.1% of male names end in a vowel, but 82.8% of female names do. However, the diachronic look at the vowel-finalizing male and female names reveals an interesting development. While the present corpus comparing 2014 to 2022 for the Netherlands showed that among the top 100, it was mainly boys' names that aligned with girls' names during this period, Bloothoof and Onland (2023) are able to establish that girls' names consistently end on a vowel at least 90% of the time from 1790 to 1960. Then, however, the values slowly but steadily decline to 72.3% in 2017 (cf. Figure 24). For boys' names,

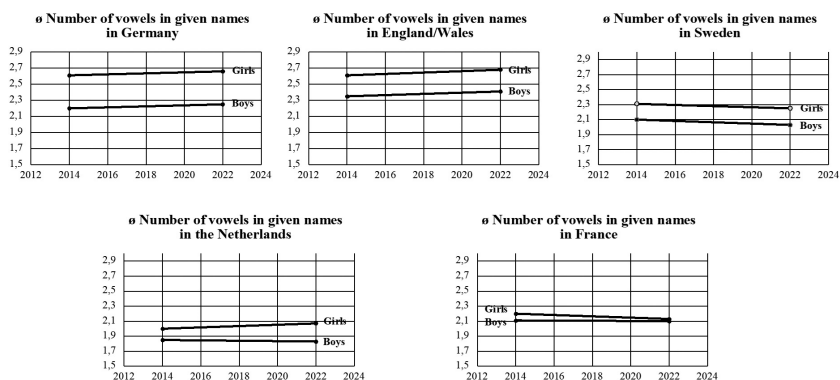


Figure 22: Average number of vowels in boys' and girls' names in five different countries, top 100 of 2014 and 2022.

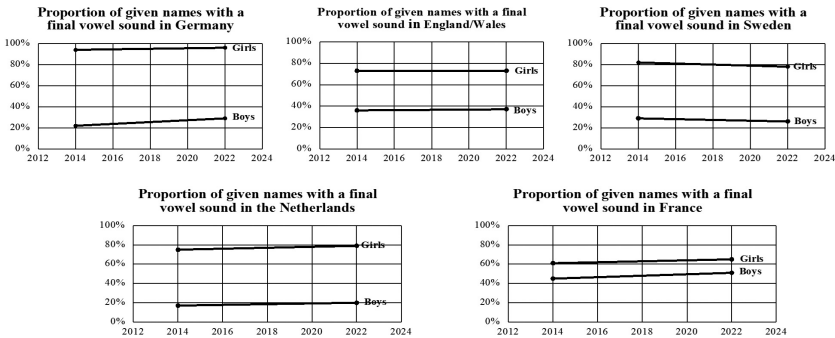


Figure 23: Proportion of boys’ and girls’ names with a final vowel sound in five different countries, top 100 of 2014 and 2022.

we see that from 1790 to 1960, continuously, only 7% end on a vowel. From the 1960s, however, boys’ names ending in a vowel increase rapidly, so that in 2017, 24.5% show a final vowel. The diachronic observation over the 227 years, thus, shows that not only have boys’ names in the Netherlands adapted to girls’ names in terms of vowel endings, as my small corpus has shown, but that since the 1960s, girls’ names have also been changing and moving toward boys’ names by having fewer vowel endings.

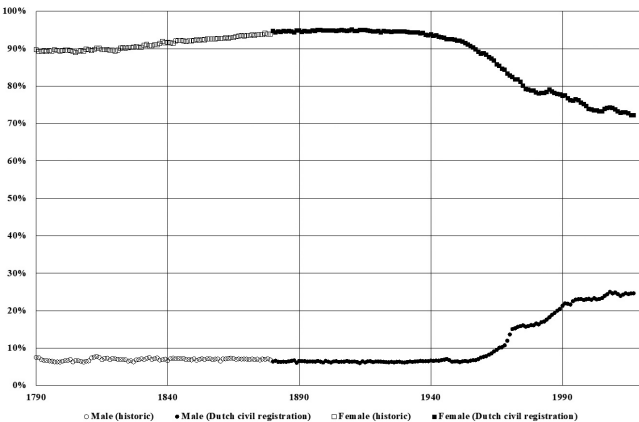


Figure 24: Proportion of vowel-ending girls’ and boys’ names from 1790 to 2017 in the Netherlands. Figure based on data of the Meertens Instituut (2023), and Bloothoof and Onland (2023).²³

Conclusion

The observations presented here need to be studied in more detail and over a longer time period. Nevertheless, these results are already important indicators that, on the one hand, despite progressive social changes with regard to classical gender role concepts, gender-neutral names have been a marginal phenomenon for years, both in Germany and in the other countries studied, and there are no signs that this will change. On the other hand, the studies of current boys' and girls' names show that in Germany, and apparently in other countries as well, given names are becoming phonologically similar. Taken together, these two findings suggest that the phonological convergence of boys' and girls' names seems to be a way that parents choose beyond gender-neutral names to respond to changing gender perceptions and to reduce gender marking in naming. Comparing different countries reveals that despite moving together in the same direction, these developments are occurring at each country's own national tempo and characteristics. For some countries, such as the United States and the Netherlands, gender-neutral names have been used for longer and to a greater extent than is the case in Germany, Denmark, and Norway. The convergence of boys' and girls' names also reveals different national patterns. In some countries, it is mainly boys' names that converge with girls' names, in other countries, girls' names also converge with boys' names. Some countries also show even larger linguistic differences between the boys' and girls' names inventories; in other countries, the differences are not (anymore) so large.

The research presented here could confirm what was already briefly and succinctly formulated in Alford's words at the beginning: namely, that names reveal a great deal about the societies and cultures in which they are given (cf. Alford, 1988, p. 57). However, the fact that these societies and cultures—even if they are similar in many aspects, as are the countries studied here—do not all develop at the same time and to the same extent, was also very clearly shown by the cross-national comparisons. Research on the close connections between names and culture is still in its infancy, especially research with a cross-national perspective (cf. Balbach 2024a, 2024b). In this regard, I encourage joint international and interdisciplinary cooperation.

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Notes

1. Cf. the top 10 baby names for recent years on the website of the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (GfdS), also Balbach (2024a).
2. Cf. the detailed evaluation on given names in Germany. Current statistics for Germany show that almost 70,000 different given names were assigned in 2022. 65.7% of these given names were selected only once. Cf. also Oelkers (2003, p. 34). But a look at the frequency of the most popular given names also shows that fewer and fewer children are receiving the same names: For example, the most popular girl's name *Emilia* was given to only 1.39% of all girls born in Germany in 2022, and the most popular boy's name *Noah* to only 1.42% of boys. In 2020, 1.54% of girls still received the most popular name *Emilia*, and 1.43% of boys received the most popular name *Noah*.
3. Here and in the following, we understand 'boys' names' to be names that are given predominantly or exclusively to boys and 'girls' names' to be names that are given predominantly or exclusively to girls. 'Gender-neutral names' are initially names that can be given to both boys and girls. In the further course of the article, we will introduce a definition of gender-neutral names in the strict and broad sense.
4. There is neither a selection list of permitted names, nor a list of prohibited names, as in many other countries.
5. For detailed information on the name law cf. Schmidt-Jüngst (2020, p. 123–138).
6. Cf. Deutsche Bundesregierung (2014): section 3, points 66/67.
7. Cf. OLG Frankfurt/Main - Beschluß vom 21.11.1997 (20 W 8/95) - DRsp Nr. 1998/16657.
8. Cf. Bundesverfassungsgericht (2008), also the new guidance issued by Deutscher Bundestag (2019). In this, the choice of a gender-neutral given name is explicitly confirmed. However, it is still recommended by many registry offices and also by GfdS (2023) to add a gender-identifying name to a gender-neutral name.
9. More details about the respective procedure and the statistics can be found on the website of GfdS (2023) and of Bielefeld (2023).
10. By a distribution 'in a balanced way', we mean that the name is assigned to at least one of the genders between 40–50%. From this, we made further gradations. Cf. endnote 17 for more details.
11. Schmuck's study also analyzes the gender-neutral names in the U.S. Top 1,000 from 2017. Contrary to what is often assumed, even in the United States, 'ambisexual names rarely achieve significant shares of the other gender.' (Schmuck, 2019, p. 151).
12. The given names from 2022 collected by GfdS cover about 95% of all newborns named in Germany in that year. The Top 1,000 evaluated here include 272,542 given names (token) for girls and, thus, still cover 81.6% of all girls' names. The top 1,000 boy's names include 292,955 given names for boys and, therefore, 83.2% of all boy's names. The evaluation of the Top 1,000 names, thus, covers a very large proportion of all names given to boys and girls. Cf. Rüdebusch (2023).
13. For a detailed description of how to calculate the gender-neutrality-index cf. Bloothoof (2021).
14. Low-German/Frisian names are very interesting, especially in the context of names and gender, as they have their very own 'permeability of the onymic gender boundary', as Nübling (2019, p. 120ff.) puts it. On this and on other specific features of East Frisian names, cf. Nübling (2019, p. 111–139), and Tammerna (2009).

15. The data can be found under the individual national statistical offices: Sweden: www.scb.se; England/Wales: www.ons.gov.uk; Netherlands: www.cbs.nl; France: www.insee.fr; Denmark: www.dst.dk; Norway: www.ssb.no; USA: www.census.gov. For Germany they can be found at www.beliebte-vornamen.de and www.gfds.de.
16. Bloothoof and Onland (2018) writes: 'On average, the percentages for males and females are very similar, which is certainly gender neutral.'
17. But the spelling *Charlie* is also used for men. However, only one spelling is established for women's names. Interestingly, the situation is different in the country of origin of *Charlie*, England/Wales, where the spelling *Charlie* is predominant among male names. For women, however, the name does not occur in any spelling, so it cannot be categorized as a gender-neutral name in England/Wales.
18. In the United States and England/Wales, on the other hand, all but one of the gender-neutral names are below the threshold of 0.23%. Here, therefore, exceeding the threshold seems to lead to the complete disappearance of the respective gender-neutral names. In this context, the recent study by Seguin, Julien, and Zhang (2021) is interesting. Using 340 million American given names between 1880 and 2016, they provide a detailed examination of American gender-neutral names. Unlike Lieberman, Dumais, & Baumann (2000), their more extensive dataset leads them to conclude that it is not primarily the fact that a gender-neutral name is preferred by one gender that leads to the decline in the other gender. Rather, they argue that for most American gender-neutral names, it is the fact that the name as a whole loses popularity in both genders and consequently is no longer used at all. My data on the disappearance of gender-neutral names beyond the frequency threshold may fit this. However, it must certainly also be considered that the United States has a very high rate of name individualization. So, overall, only a few names are given to more than 0.23% of each birth cohort each year. For example, the most popular girl's name *Olivia* in the United States is given to only 0.5% of a birth cohort, and the most popular boy's name *Liam* also to just 0.5%. This means, therefore, that overall, only very few names make it above this threshold in the United States.
19. In the context of names and gender, it is interesting to note the observation by Bloothoof and Onland (2018) that in the Dutch name inventory, women's names derived from men's names with the help of the diminutive suffix *-je* have decreased in recent years. Bloothoof and Onland see the reasons for this strong decrease in the last approximately 50 years in the emancipation of women. However, since Bloothoof and Onland can prove in their historical name corpus that the decline begins as early as 1880, they locate the origin of the decline in a change in Protestant naming practices since the 19th century.
20. Especially with older names, gender assignments are only possible by learning, since names like *Doris* (f.) and *Boris* (m.), *Ruth* (f.) and *Knut* (m.), *Dagmar* (f.) and *Volkmar* (m.) differ only by single sounds.
21. See also Schmidt-Jüngst (2020, p. 108–122). She has shown by statistical tests that the features syllable number and main accent, final sound, consonant/vowel share, and sonorant/obstruent share play a significant role in the phonological gender marking of female and male names.
22. The sample of 2,000 names was transcribed in a multistep process. First, the names of each country were transcribed into IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) using a custom-built prompt with the help of an AI. These transcriptions were checked in a

second step by our linguistic team. Errors were eliminated and, in the case of several pronunciations, the most widespread (= standard) pronunciation was researched and included. In a third step, all names and their pronunciations were checked by native speakers. This was followed by an annotation of four selected features that Nübling (2018), Oelkers (2003), Schmidt-Jüngst (2020), and Ackermann and Zimmer (2021) had found to be particularly relevant femininity or masculinity markers and that were feasible for our team to perform within the time constraints of this study: syllable number of names, vocalic and consonantal sound share of each name, and ending sound of each name.

23. Data from <https://nvb.meertens.knaw.nl/>. Search string '[aeiouyij]\$', for advanced search to search for all names that end in a vowel sound.

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Gender Distinction in European Spanish Anthroponyms

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ABSTRACT: The Spanish language does not contain any morphological markers that theoretically determine a person's gender, so it is common usage that enables us to deduce this characteristic. Nevertheless, we have referred here to several sources, including a longitudinal quantitative study from the 1930s to the present day using the databases of Spain's National Institute of Statistics, a corpus of the most frequent surnames and given names, and surveys on onomastic attribution. The aim has been to identify current trends in gender representation in Spain through both a structural and attributive approach, with the following conclusions: hyperfeminization of girl names, differentiation (the masculine -o or consonant endings) in boy names, the disappearance or feminization of traditional common names, the use of gender-neutral names in response to current mores, and gender hypercharacterization of transgender names.

KEYWORDS: socio-onomastics, anthroponymy, gender distinction, gender-neutral, Spain, Spanish

Introduction. Gender Distinction in Anthroponyms

A given name, first name, or forename tends to be one of the main indicators of a person's gender. It is not always a straightforward process as there are names that can be applied regardless of gender identity, although there is legislation, in Spain at least, that forbids the use of terms that blur the distinction between genders. Accordingly, Spain's Law 20/2011, of 21 July, on the Civil Register [*Registro Civil*] safeguards the right to the free choice of a given name except in three cases, one of which involves any confusion in a person's identity.¹

The main purpose of anthroponyms, namely, a person's identification, is not a trifling matter, and it extends to a name's identity role, not only from a personal perspective but also as an accepted expression of the categories that structure our societies, among which gender is one of the most prevalent (Tahat, 2019). Like

the rest of the language, and possibly to an even greater extent, anthroponymic repertoires develop and evolve, clearly reflecting the trends, fashions, and values prevailing at any given moment in our social history (Aleksiejuk, 2015; Aldrin, 2017).

Spanish speakers find it easy to match a person's given name to their gender according to the customary use of anthroponyms (Bajo Pérez, 2008). It is accepted that *Inés* is a girl name and *Luis* applies to a boy, although there is nothing in their structure that justifies this conclusion. However, new names may now raise doubts, as opposed to other languages that have perfectly defined rules for the two sexes. The distinguishing patterns in Western languages tend to be of a formal nature: the initial or final sounds, and the accented or syllabic structure, among others (Slater and Feinman, 1985; Cassidy, Kelly, and Sharoni, 1999).

All nouns in Spanish, whether common or personal, have a grammatical gender, with an array of different procedures for signaling it.² Firstly, and as occurs in other Romance languages, the variation or change in the ending helps identify an individual, as in such boy-girl pairings as *Antonio-Antonia*, *Vicente-Vicenta*, and *Ángel-Ángela*. Secondly, there are heteronyms—etymologically paired names—that are not perceived as opposites through their variation. Such is the case of *José-Josefa*, *Andrés-Andrea*, and *Esteban-Estefanía*. Thirdly, there are anthroponyms that are solely masculine or feminine, as occurs with the boy names *Matías* and *Óscar* and the girl names *Beatriz*, *Matilde*, and *Sara*. Finally, there are the so-called *nomina communia*, those names that may be both masculine and feminine (*Amparo*, *Trinidad*, *Consolación*, *Cruz*), whereby the person's gender may be deduced solely by the context or by qualifying terms (i.e., adjectives and pronouns). This last type of name, as we will see in due course, has been feminized and is now rarely used for boys, except in certain parts of Latin America (Bajo Pérez, 2008). These procedures may include a further one, namely, the addition of *María* (*María Isabel*, *María del Pilar*), which is also used to feminize strictly masculine names (*María José*, *María Jesús*).³

Besides these morphological markers, there are others of a structural nature that will be described later, but we should not overlook other manifestations of gender distinction, which we can frame within the differentiated attributive patterns in place for boys and girls. Suffice to say here that the most common patterns in the former case are linked to tradition and heritage, whereas the latter are governed by other principles such as originality, fashion, and uniqueness (Rossi, 1965; Boyd-Bowman, 1970; Allen, Brown, Dickinson and Pratt *apud* Lawson, 1971; Lieberman, 2000; García Gallarín, 2007; López Franco, 2014; Fernández Juncal, 2002, 2018, and 2019).

We therefore contend that it is the conflation of both perspectives, one of a more formal nature and the other following more social guidelines, that informs

the gender distinction of names in the Spanish spoken in Spain, as the variations spoken in Latin America apply other parameters of influences and tendencies. The following pages conduct an analysis of both aspects based on prior studies, seeking to encapsulate the factors that explain the current situation in European Spanish.

Method

Our findings here are based on numerous sources. Firstly, we use valuable data provided by Spain's National Institute of Statistics, the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INE), as they encompass Spain's entire present population and enable us to detect the variations across the different timeframes studied (from 1930 to the present day).⁴ This information is regularly posted on its website and includes the following data, among others:

- The 50 most common names by decade of birth, whereby we may track the evolution of the phenomena being analyzed. This dataset responds to the consideration made by Weitman (1981) on the use of the whole corpus or of a representative part of it. This will primarily involve using the data chosen according to the highest rates, the so-called *popularity*, which better represent the general trends in naming.
- The overall data: that is, the most common names among people living in Spain that record a frequency equal to or above 20 (this case uses the average age of the bearers).⁵
- These two lists have been used to compile two datasets of interest: names with an average age younger than 20 years, which provide clues on new tastes and fashions, and the list of common names used steadily from one generation to the next.

In addition to these primary sources of a comprehensive nature, there is another complementary resource: the list of available given names gathered by Fernández Juncal and Hernández Muñoz (2019) through a survey administered in the first half of 2018 in the Spanish province of Salamanca. The available lexicon is the sum of words that speakers can recall and whose use is conditioned by the specific matter of communication, the so-called *centres of interest* or *notional scopes*. The point of departure assumes that the collective lexicon provided by the tests of an associative nature dilutes individual differences and reflects uniform trends in vocabulary in a cohort or community. This lexicon reveals an understanding of a shared reality and the existence of prototypes, the most common or frequent aspects, and the units acquired at an early stage (Hernández, Izura, and Ellis, 2006).

The sample consisted of 60 informants selected by quota with uniform allocation; in other words, each cohort provided by the stratification (with the variables

gender, age, and level of education) is represented by the same number of individuals. The questionnaire consisted of nine centers of interest,⁶ although this study involves two, which will enable us to draw a comparison with the data provided by the INE: girl and boy names. The survey was held orally, as some older adult respondents with little schooling would have found it difficult to complete the written questionnaire (Hernández Muñoz, 2010; Tomé Cornejo, 2015).⁷

In addition to the above sources, we have accessed data gathered for an as-yet unpublished study on the so-called *onomastic narrative* (Fernández Juncal, forthcoming). The narrative method is a well-established research procedure in the social sciences, especially in the field of ethnography. According to this methodology, the actual narrative becomes the subject of study, focusing on the notion that speakers give meaning to their life events, specifically the origin of their name and their coexistence with it, through that self-same narrative. Furthermore, it sheds light on the interaction among society, communities, and individuals (Salzer, 1998). In socio-onomastic terms, we are transplanting the array of resources used in what is referred to as *folk onomastics* (Ainiala, 2016; Ainiala and Östman, 2017) or *popular metonymic discourse* (Becker, 2018).

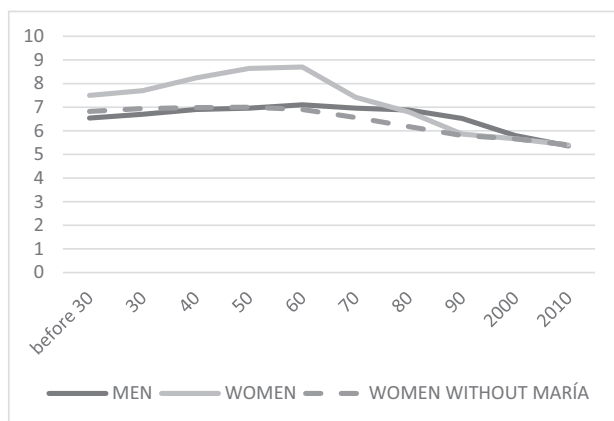
Finally, we have the surveys conducted by Vinagre Vázquez (2023) in a very recent study supervised by Fernández Juncal on the processes of self-attribution in the trans and non-binary community in the region of Castile and Leon. Besides gathering information on the new names of a cohort of 40 respondents, the study addresses the process of change, focuses on the problems and difficulties encountered in that change, and uses an onomastic narrative according to the model already described to explore the reasons for choosing the new name.

The statistics used here involve the three aspects that Weitman (1981) considers essential in studies of this nature: *raw data*, which have the drawback of providing data that are more demographic than onomastic; the *frequencies proportional* to the affected population; and, above all, the *ranking* of the different names regarding all of the others on the list of frequencies, which is undoubtedly the best yardstick for tracking a name's movement in terms of popularity.⁸ Finally, regarding data processing, the surveys have undergone a statistical analysis with the tools provided by the website DispoLex.com and the sum of global data forthcoming from the two sources specified (INE data and available given names) using version 23 of the SPSS program.

Data Analysis

Structural Differences

Fernández Juncal (2019 and 2021a) analyzes the possible formal differences that may be found between masculine and feminine names in several parameters. An



Graph 1: Average values of the evolution in the number of phonemes in the most frequent anthroponyms by decades (Source: Fernández Juncal, 2021a).

initial step involves measuring the length of the anthroponyms (phonemes and syllables), which has evolved in step in both repertoires toward a reduction in the phonic corpus of both phonemes and syllables, especially over the past three decades. This tendency may be due to the decline in the use of compound names, especially those involving the name *María*. Graph 1 plots their progress through the two catalogues' convergence over the past decade, which suggests that we are not dealing with a significant parameter in gender distinction.

The patterns of accenting in anthroponyms are also similar between boys and girls, whereby (as only to be expected in Spanish) there are numerous paroxytones (i.e., words accented on the penultimate syllable) such as *Antonio* or *Elena* in both cases. In turn, there are hardly any anthroponyms in either gender with the stress on the antepenultimate syllable (*Álvaro*, *Ángeles*), consistent with its scarce general presence in Spanish. There is, nevertheless, a marked difference: girls have recorded a gradual decrease in acute anthroponyms (*Pilar*, *Raquel*), whereas they have remained almost steady among boys (*José*, *Raúl*).

Thirdly, we study an aspect that appears to be of greater importance, namely, the termination of names. As mentioned earlier, Spanish generally has cases of boy-girl variation (*Antonio-Antonia*), with or without derivation (*Guillermo-Guillermina*) and with or without heteronymy (*Pedro-Petra*), although in principle terminations do not necessarily constitute a gender marker. This means there are girl names ending in *-o* (*Rocío*, *Consuelo*) and boy and girl names ending in a range of consonants (*Carlos*, *Inés*, *Javier*, *Pilar*, *Gabriel*, *Isabel*) or, more rarely, boy names ending in *-a* (*Bautista*, *Borja*)⁹ and in other vowels in both genders (*Jaime*, *Irene*, *Araceli*, *Espíritu*).¹⁰ Table 1 presents the corresponding data for the 50 most common names recorded over the past decades.

GENDER		TERMINATION						DECADE (50 most common names)			
		Before 1930	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	2000	2010
BOY											
	-/o/	22	23	19	17	17	17	17	15	15	18
	-/a/	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0
	-other vowel	6	6	6	6	8	7	6	5	4	3
	-consonant	21	20	24	26	24	25	26	28	31	29
	TOTAL	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
GIRL											
	-/o/	3	3	4	4	2	1	1	1	1	1
	-/a/	27	27	27	24	27	31	33	38	43	45
	-other vowel	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	2	1	2
	-consonant	19	19	19	21	20	17	14	9	5	2
	TOTAL	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

Table 1: Trend in the Final Phonemes Among the Most Common Anthroponyms
Source. Fernández Juncal, 2021a.

There is a clear process of specialization whereby the termination *-a* disappears from the masculine repertoire and increases exponentially among girls, where it accounts for most cases. In turn, the termination *-o* is clearly linked to the masculine repertoire, although it has lost some of its popularity in favor of a consonant ending. The masculine catalogue proves to be more stable than its feminine counterpart, which has been subject to more changes, as we will see in the next paragraph. These data are consistent with those compiled through the survey on lexical availability.¹¹

Closely related to this parameter is another formal trait that supports the feminization of names through the inclusion of a marker associated with the grammatical feminine *a*, in this case within the anthroponym. We thus encounter structures in which there is another identical sound besides the termination *-a*, which appears either as a tonic vowel (*Ana, Clara, Laura*) or as an atonal one (*Martina, Carlota*). This vowel distribution (áXa or aXa) is extremely common: it appears in 60% of the most common girl names over the past decade, almost 40% of our corpus of available names, and 57% of the list of names of individuals with an average age younger than 20 years and over 5000 users.

Finally, we have looked for *nomina communia* in all of these corpuses, which were not unusual at other times in Spain and which, as already noted, are still present in other parts of the Spanish-speaking world. This double usage has now completely disappeared, whereby they are used mainly as girl names, thus avoiding any gender ambiguity. This movement has been observed in other languages,

meaning there are few androgenous names, with a short impact time (Barry and Harper, 1993; Lieberman, Dumais, and Baumann, 2000). The affected names lose their popularity instantly and become used solely for one or another gender, mostly for girls, who are more likely to receive a boy name than boys are to receive a girl name. This disambiguation process also affects the pairing with gender variation (*Ramón-Ramona*). Our data show that the alternating mechanism has become outdated, and the preference is now for names that are not associated with their masculine or feminine versions. A preference is therefore found for avoiding possible confusion and more accurately signaling the gender of the name's bearer. This means that *Antonio* has ousted *Antonia*, while *Julia* has done the same to *Julio*, a situation that has already been reported by García Gallarín (1998: 25) for the end of the 20th century: "The data reveal that the consideration of 'typically masculine,' 'typically feminine' has led to the gradual disappearance of gender oppositions and a reduction of forms susceptible to gender marking."

The overall results follow a fairly clear trend: there is a formal divergence between the masculine and feminine repertoires through a process of hyper-feminizing girl names and the disappearance of those features common to both genders, which have shifted to the feminine catalogue. This is an analogous situation to the one found in other languages (Okrent, 2014), in which the movements in onomastic attribution do not follow predetermined and immovable gender patterns, although the system ensures that gender distinction is upheld.

Differences in Attributive Patterns

As stated in the introduction, numerous socio-onomastic studies on a range of languages have reported that boy names have a more stable format and tend to be more conservative, without being so obviously affected by the innovations, a situation that has been found in a plethora of prior studies, both on Spain and on other cultures and languages (Busse and Seraydian, 1978; Lieberman and Bell, 1992; Lieberman, 2000; Boullón, 2007). Innovations are more likely to affect the feminine catalogue than its more traditional masculine equivalent (Gutman, 1977; Van Poppel, Bloothoof, Gerritzen, and Verduin, 1999; Hegarty, Watson, Fletcher, and McQueen, 2011; Obasi, 2016); this also means that the feminine repertoire is expected to be broader and more diverse. This is the origin of a trend that after 50 years continues to be perceptible, again in diverse cultures and languages, including Spain, or in artificial languages such as Esperanto (Moinhos Pardavilla, 2015).

According to Rossi (1965), family continuity is still linked to male offspring, which means they tend to inherit their father's name or that of some other relative, while the choice for girls usually responds less to a sense of union and family legacy

and more to such criteria as fashion (see also Tucker, 2009; Jiménez Segura, 2016; Parada, 2016). Lieberman and Bell (1992) furthermore posit that the masculine repertoire therefore remains more stable, while the feminine one is more dynamic.

Our data fully ratify these assumptions. Fernández Juncal (2019) reports a general tendency toward a dispersion of the repertoire from the 1930s to 2018, with individual names no longer accounting for a significant percentage of the population and the avoidance of overly popular ones (Mateos, 2006; Mateos, Webber, and Longley, 2007; Mateos and Tucker, 2008; Albaigès, 2014; Xi, Zhang, Zhang, Ge, She, and Zhan, 2014). This general pattern is more readily apparent among girls, with an illustrative example being that as from the 1970s, a momentous decade in Spain because of the political, social, and cultural changes it underwent, 20 (40%) of the 50 most popular names fell from the corresponding list, and the remaining 60% fell significantly from the position they held in the previous decade.

These differences in the attributive patterns of boy and girl names are confirmed by several circumstances. Firstly, we analyze the use of compound names for boys and girls. It is common practice in Spanish to have a single given name, although the use of *María*, now in decline but frequent in the past, subverted that propensity.¹² The data therefore indicate that the use of compound names is clearly receding among today's generations for both boys and girls (in contrast with multiple or juxtaposed names, which have increased in number). If we omit the ubiquitous use of *María*, as we have explained, the use of compound names is much more common in boys than in girls. This mechanism is understood to be a tool that allows extending the catalogue of names and thereby improving onomastic identification. Nevertheless, this does not explain gender differences. We have explained this situation by linking it to heritage as an instrument of attribution, which was crucial in the past, but has now surrendered its pivotal role to other onomastic models or values such as individuality and originality. It is therefore to be expected that heritage will have a greater impact on boys in a patriarchal society as the line of succession passes through the paternal side, as in other aspects (Rossi, 1965), while the choice of names on the feminine side tends to be more influenced by fashion and less by a sense of family heritage and belonging. A compound name upholds the custom of receiving a forebear's name, while at the same time adding one that is more to the parent's taste, and this explains its role as a mechanism of transition between the two tendencies specified, as a procedure that simultaneously combines heritage and individuality.

A second aspect that may confirm the tendencies described is that the number of boy names that remain on the INE's list of the 50 most common ones¹³ triples those of girls (12 to 4), which reflects the conservative nature of the former compared with the volatility of the latter (Fernández Juncal, 2021b).

Study	MASCULINE	FEMININE
Trucíos (Basque-Spanish contact) (1981–2000)	0.74	0.9
Average across all decades (Fernández Juncal, 2018)	0.72	0.75
Handbooks for Spanish as a Second Language (ELE) (Fernández Juncal, 2023)	0.12	0.15
Spain-Brazil, a comparative study		
Spain (INE data)	0.27	0.35
Brazil (IBGE data) (Fernández Juncal and Sipavicius Seide, 2021)	0.29	0.43
Santa Marta (Salamanca) (Fernández Juncal, 2002)	0.42	0.52

Table 2: Onomastic Diversity Index (ODI) in Diverse Studies
Source. Fernández Juncal.

Along these same lines, there is a third value, the onomastic diversity index (ODI), which may help us confirm this distribution. The ODI is calculated by dividing the number of different names by the number of individuals, which gives a value of 1 if everyone has a different name and a value close to zero if everyone shares the same name. This index is especially useful for measuring the size of the catalogue of names and the repertoire’s dispersion or convergence. Table 2 shows that the ODI has always been higher for girl names in all studies in which we have applied this index.

This figure needs to include others that tend to be applied to the dictionaries of words available. Our corpus of available anthroponyms (Fernández Juncal and Hernández Muñoz, 2019 and 2021) contains a greater variety of girl names than boy names, even though the latter generally receive more responses, obviously with more repeats. This situation clearly affects the higher cohesion index (CI)¹⁴ in boys (0.07) than in girls (0.06), thereby confirming the compact nature of the former, with more points in common among its component features compared with the dispersion in the latter case, with greater internal variety and, therefore, more dissimilarities among the units it comprises.

A comparable situation involves each cohort’s compatibility index, meaning the information on the degree of lexical coincidence in the lists of names available in each case. This involves the variables of gender, level of education, and age of the informants and an analysis of 80% of the names (excluding the lexical units provided by a single informant), with boy names recording higher rates of compatibility, which should again be interpreted as evidence of the compactness of this cohort, with a greater density than its feminine equivalent.

A comparison of the available names with the INE catalogue reveals that names for girls occupy a more peripheral position both in rate of appearance and in the average age of the bearers, meaning that names for boys record a much higher degree of centrality than those for girls gathered through the lexical survey.

The sum of onomastic narratives (Fernández Juncal, forthcoming) enables us to reach similar conclusions to those specified earlier. Firstly, the traditional procedure of inheriting a forebear's name is a great deal more common among boys. A name is a "symbolic asset" that is conveyed from one generation to the next (Sangoï, 1985); an individual becomes a link in the chain of succession (Van Poppel, Bloothoof, Gerritzen, and Verduin, 1999). A name's generational transmission has become so ingrained that even its very existence is denied, despite its obvious importance "My two elder brothers have been named after family members, my brother Humberto José takes the name of one of my great uncles. But this does not follow any specific tradition," "No procedure is followed at home (...). I'm named after my grandfather." In turn, and as already noted, individual or parental choice when choosing an offspring's name, which is a more recent attributive pattern, is a factor that has a greater bearing among women, who are more susceptible to values such as uniqueness, innovation, and originality: "Priscila was a rarely used name, but it is very pretty and original," "They thought Noa sounded original, as a fairly uncommon name," "My name (Edelweiss) was a matter of taste and originality."

This conclusion is further corroborated by the fact that girls seem to be affected more by certain attributive models, such as the use of foreign names, celebrity names, so-called *transparent* names in the form of common nouns as personal ones (*Abril-April, Jade, Lluvia-Rain*), toponyms as anthroponyms (*India, Siena, Ítaca-Ithaca*), orthographic variation (*Mishelle, Mayka, Shantal*), and names that were originally hypocoristic or diminutives (*Lola, Angelita*).

This section concludes with the findings of a study on self-attribution among transgender or non-binary groups (Vinagre Vázquez, 2023), with interviews and onomastic narratives of 40 respondents in the region of Castile and Leon. The study needs to be developed in the future, but it still evidences the trends currently affecting these communities:

The nature of the Spanish language, little given to ambiguous or common names (Fernández Juncal, 2021a), seems to require a fairly acute gender distinction in its onomastic repertoire, whereby girl and boy names tend to be perceived as "typically masculine" or "typically feminine," respectively. Such is the case also of transgender individuals in a position to conduct their own naming process. Following the language's own patterns means that a given

name is positioned at one or other end of the masculine-feminine spectrum: speakers quickly identify *Alicia* or *Olivia* with girl names, and *Pablo* or *Ángel* with boy names. (Vinagre Vázquez, 2023: 10–11)

In other words, Vinagre Vázquez (2023) points out that the chosen names are polarized and are evidently feminine or evidently masculine, avoiding ambiguity. This polarization also affects foreign names (*Harry*, *Mark*, *Zoé*), which are also fairly common in the corpus compiled. In other words, this confirms the premise that this group also records name-based gender hypercharacterization, although in this case according to the gender recorded at the time of attribution and not at birth. Therefore, the name is not simply a label for identifying the individual but also a way of constituting their actual identity, a public expression of acceptance and its disclosure to the individual's social milieu, and a crucial aspect in their new life trajectory (Pilcher, 2017; Russell, Pollitt, Li, and Grossman, 2018; Anzani, Rucco, Lorusso, and Prunas, 2022).

By contrast, the anthroponyms that non-binary individuals have given themselves are either markedly androgenous or indistinct (*Kalei*, *Mitos*), and this follows two pathways: the ex-novo creation of new anthroponyms and importing them from other onomastic traditions.

Conclusions

A review of the mechanisms that anthroponyms follow and that may be used to identify their bearer's gender enables us to distinguish the more immediate or structural ones that underpin the core attribution processes in the configuration of masculine and feminine onomastic models.

As regards to the former, there appears to be formal freedom for anthroponyms in terms of the gender they represent, and customary use defines the anthroponym's gender allocation. This means there is no limitation whatsoever, and both the feminine and the masculine repertoire share common patterns, both in termination (initially with no restrictions in either case, with greater specification in terms of gender movement) and in accented structure or length of the name. Nevertheless, a study of real usages over the past decades reveals certain tendencies that differentiate between boy and girl names. The termination of a given name is the key factor for signaling gender distinction, whereby the *-a* ending provides irrefutable evidence of the feminine, with very few cases remaining in Spanish tradition in which that ending is used for boys. In turn, the *-o* ending that applied to names for girls (many of which were ambigender) is now hardly used (only *Rocío* appears on the list of most popular girl names). A consonant ending has been narrowed down to boy names, with this trend being linked to the greater presence of the oxytone pattern for that gender.

These developments are qualified by other verified data: the obvious decline in common names in favor of their use for girls, avoiding possible ambiguities, and the increasing tendency toward the hyperfeminization of girl names with structures that repeat the /a/ at the end and within them. Although the number of surveys would need to be expanded, the data available thus far suggest that this process of differentiation also occurs among trans communities, but not among individuals in the non-binary gender community, who precisely seek to avoid the forms that could signal gender polarization. In sum, there are clear modifications in the system, but always in the same direction: upholding gender distinction through anthroponymic repertoires.

From the perspective of attribution, Spanish follows the same patterns that have been detected in other cultures and languages, with the persistent repetition of what may now be considered a constant in onomastic customs: they are not the same mechanisms as those that govern the choice of a name according to a newborn's gender. The desire to continue the family line is more prevalent among boys, while girls respond to other values, such as uniqueness and innovation. This has its ramifications in the respective naming repertoires, being more conservative, more stable, and generally more restricted for boys, while more innovative, more dynamic, and more diverse for girls.

The sum of the results addressed from both perspectives (formal and attributive) highlights the variable's importance from a social viewpoint, and as is to be expected, among transgender and non-binary communities.

It might seem that the evolution in the tastes for different names is an uneven, random, and haphazard process. Nevertheless, Mateos, Longley, and O'Sullivan (2011: 1) affirm that "personal naming practices exist in all human groups and are far from random. Rather, they continue to reflect social norms and ethno-cultural customs that have developed over generations." The process reflects major values inherent to the community, and gender distinction constitutes one of the more primary ones.

Notes

1. A recent amendment has added the following statement: "As regards deciding whether the identification is confusing, no consideration is to be given to the correspondence between a name and a person's gender or sexual identity" (art. 51, 2), thereby reflecting a change in the perception of a name as an indicator of sex or gender.
2. This description follows the study by Bajo Pérez (2008), which conducts a thorough analysis of this morphological aspect of personal nouns in general and of anthroponyms in particular.
3. The legislation governing Spain's Civil Register up to 1978, at the time when the country was undergoing its transition from dictatorship to democracy, stated that "the registration is to specify the name given to the newborn, which is to be, as appropriate,

the one with which it is baptised” (paragraph one of the Law of 8 June 1957 on the Civil Register). In turn, canon 761 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law stated the following: “Pastors should take care that a Christian name is given to those whom they baptize; but if they are not able to bring this about, they will add to the name given by the parents the name of some Saint and record both names in the book of baptisms.” The combination of regulations prompted, on the one hand, the overriding use of the calendar of saints as the guide for parents and, on the other, the Christianization of names by sundry procedures, with the most common one being the inclusion of Christian names, mainly *María* and *José*, which were added to the ones the parents had chosen. Although it had no legal grounding, the use of *María* to form compound names does not date from this time; García Gallarín (2009 and 2014) attests it to the transition from the medieval to the classical era.

4. Socio-onomastic studies tend to resort to institutional sources. García Gallarín (2014: 19) reports that “this allows rigorous research into modern trends in Spanish anthroponomy.” In the case of the INE, the data correspond to statistics provided by the municipal census [Padrón Continuo], updated and coordinated on the basis of the files each local council submits to the INE, which then screens the data to ensure their uniformity and the consistency of the variables. This study used the data issued on 29 May 2018. Nonetheless, we should not ignore some of this source’s limitations: firstly, it does not include names with a frequency of less than 20. Secondly, and in contrast with other registers, there is no sociological data on the individual bearer and their background (e.g., parents and grandparents).
5. Weitman (1981) contends accordingly that the inferences we reach from the socio-onomastic analysis should be attributed to the ones choosing the names and not their bearers.
6. Besides those mentioned, there are the following: names of towns/cities, names of countries, names of brands, name of businesses, family names, and surnames.
7. On this occasion, and considering prior experiences, the response time for each notional field has been reduced to a minimum. It should be noted that the content of the focal points has not caused any doubts among the interviewees and there have not been any cases involving the semantic extension of the requested field (e.g., evocations and names peripheral to the category).
8. For example, Lieberman (2000), whose study we consider to be seminal, analyses the most common names (the top 10 and 50 in timeframes ranging from two to a hundred years).
9. They are more common among other cultures on the Iberian Peninsula, as in the Basque repertoire, with boy names such as *Gorka* and *Edorta*, and in Catalonia, with *Adrià* and *Macià*.
10. This diversity of possibilities is even more evident in hypocoristics (*Luchi*, *Javi*, *Tere*, *Fede*, *Manu*, *Malú*).
11. The statistical analysis involving Pearson’s chi-square goodness of fit for both sources confirms these findings, whereby boy names follow a normal distribution while girl ones record a significant association between feminine names and terminations.
12. We should also note that we distinguish between a compound name (customary, formed by an accepted combination of names such as *José Luis* and *Ana Isabel*) and multiple names (sporadic, forming by a combination of different names such as *Pedro Alejandro* and *Laura Cristina*) (López Franco, 2010; Frai 2016).

13. The same occurs with other lists such as the one of available names, as well as the one compiled by Mateos and Tucker (2008).
14. The CI is calculated by dividing the average number of words per informant by the number of different words or terms, and it reflects, on a range of 0 to 1, the disperse or compact nature of the cognitive field; that is, the degree of coincidence the informants record on a given focal point. This value indicates the size of each one of the points in terms of prompting a higher or lower number of associations.

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Gender-Neutral Names in the Youngest Japanese Generation: Characteristics of Their Phonological and Graphic Forms

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ABSTRACT: Gender-neutral names have received increasing attention in recent Japanese public discourse regarding names and naming practices. Names referred to as gender-neutral (*chūseiteki* or *jendāresu* in Japanese) are commonly considered to be names that can be given to both boys and girls, and their gender-neutral character is discussed explicitly in relation to the phonological and/or graphic form of the name. Although gender-neutral names represent a minority compared to gender-specific names, they are clearly growing in popularity. This study explores gender-neutral names in contemporary Japanese naming practices, their linguistic characteristics, and the mechanisms behind their evolution. The analysis is based on 39 phonological and 57 graphic forms classified as gender-neutral among 256 distinct phonological and 333 distinct graphic forms of names given to children of both sexes. These names were identified from a dataset of 15,058 names collected from the parenting website Baby Calendar between 2008 and 2022. The study also highlights the specifics of gender-neutral naming in Japan that are related to the use of kanji, allowing for names to be gender-neutral only in their phonological or graphic form.

KEYWORDS: gender-neutral names, given names, Japanese, young people, kanji, phonological forms

Introduction

We think that, recently, gender has not been limited just to male and female, and so, considering the future, we decided on a gender-neutral name for our

son [Shion]. My husband thought, however, that it would be good to have it at least written with masculine kanji [士音].

Shion's mother, 2018, Baby Calendar (transl. from Japanese)

In Japan, traditional gender roles have long been deeply ingrained in family dynamics, the workplace, and society at large. However, since the last decades of the 20th century, gender role differences have been diminishing (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002; Rebeck and Takenaka, 2006), as evidenced in various aspects of life, including language (Carroll, 2006) and naming. Naming practices have undergone major changes, reflecting changes in society, including the weakening of intergenerational ties within the family (Unser-Schutz, 2019; Barešová and Janda, 2023) and increasing individualism (Ogihara, et al., 2015). In Japan, as in various other countries, there is a growing interest in names that are not specifically associated with any particular gender, reflecting a shift toward more inclusive and diverse naming practices. Recent Japanese baby name rankings highlight this trend, showing an increased popularity of names given to both boys and girls. This development is encouraged by parenting and baby name websites, which, in addition to offering names for boys and girls, increasingly list names that can be given to both.

Japanese parents enjoy the freedom to choose a name for their child without being limited to an official list of approved names. They consider multiple criteria, focusing on both the sound and the way it is represented in writing. Typically, they proceed from the phonological to the graphic form (see, e.g., Kobayashi, 2009), while taking their other priorities into account. When selecting the written form, they can choose from a pool of 2,999 kanji¹ (adapted Chinese characters) that are currently permitted to be used in names (Barešová, 2020a), or they can opt for one of the two syllabaries: hiragana or katakana.²

The growing emphasis on each child's individuality and unique personality over the last several decades, coupled with few legal restrictions on naming,³ has manifested in a great variety of sound and structure patterns, innovative combinations of kanji, and frequent disparities between the phonological form of the name and the standard readings of the kanji used (e.g., Kobayashi, 2009; Makino, 2012; Barešová, 2016; Unser-Schutz, 2016a). Additionally, names are increasingly lacking gender-distinctive features in their phonological and/or graphic form (Satō, 2007; Barešová, 2020a).

The explanation for the choice of the name *Shion* presented above comes from the parenting website Baby Calendar (*Bebī karendā*). This source includes 'name selection stories' of 21 boys and 11 girls named *Shion*, born between 2008 and 2022. The name has 24 different graphic forms: 23 two-kanji combinations, and one written in hiragana, a script used mostly for girls' names. Through the

meaning of the kanji, some of the graphic forms give a more masculine impression (e.g., 志雄 ‘ambition’ + ‘man’), others more feminine (e.g., 雫音 ‘drop’ + ‘sound’), and some lack gender-specific features altogether (e.g., 史穩 ‘history’ + ‘calm’). It is highly likely that some of the forms found here for either only boys or only girls would be found attributed to both in a more extensive dataset.

This study is part of a larger project investigating the recent phenomenon of Japanese names bestowed upon both boys and girls. While our concurrent studies attempt to uncover the underlying motivations and perceptions associated with such names, the focus of this article is on providing their linguistic description. We analyze gender-neutral phonological and graphic forms used in the last 15 years, discuss them in the context of current Japanese naming practices, and provide insights into their characteristic features and origin.

Gender-Neutral Names in Japan

Japanese names are not legally required to indicate gender; however, a significant majority of them exhibit gender-specific characteristics. These gender-distinctive features have evolved over time. For example, more than a century ago, names for boys and girls were written in different scripts. While boys, irrespective of their social status, typically received names written in kanji, which were associated with sophistication and education, most girls, especially those from lower-class families, had their names written in hiragana or katakana (Jugaku, 1979, p. 48). Nowadays, the majority of names given to girls are also written in kanji. Names in hiragana or a combination of hiragana and kanji are infrequent but are still strongly associated with women. Gender is expressed both morphologically and semantically, often through masculine or feminine end syllables, represented by gender-specific kanji. For example, names ending in *-to* (斗, 人, 翔, etc.), such as *Haruto* 陽翔 and *Yuito* 結人, are typically given to boys, whereas names ending in *-na* (菜, 奈, 愛, etc.), such as *Haruna* 陽菜 and *Yuina* 結奈, are commonly given to girls. Additionally, the length of the phonological form plays a role in gender distinction; while two- and three-mora⁴ names are common for both genders, four to six-mora names are usually bestowed upon boys (Barešová, 2020a, p. 31).

Names used for both boys and girls are not a recent phenomenon in Japan. However, recent baby name rankings indicate their increasing popularity. The top 100 baby boy and baby girl names of 2022, as published by Baby Calendar, based on 107,289 names of children born that year, featured 19 names (phonological forms) that ranked in both lists. Such a high number has not been observed before.

Gender-Neutral Names in Public Discourse

This recent phenomenon of names that are given to both boys and girls has been widely commented on in Japanese media, including newspapers, lifestyle Web magazines (e.g., *Kuraneo*), blogs and discussion forums (e.g., Yahoo! Chiebukuro), and numerous parenting and baby names websites (e.g., Shogakukan HugKum, mamari, and Baby Calendar). Such media platforms potentially influence or even set trends, ultimately impacting the views and perceptions of their users and customers.

In Japanese public discourse, these names are usually referred to as *chūseiteikina* or *jendāresuna namae* ('gender-neutral' or 'genderless names') and are explained as names that can be given to both boys and girls, names that do not feel unnatural when used by men and women, or names that do not evoke a sense of masculinity or femininity. The gender-neutral character of names is usually discussed on the above-mentioned websites based on their phonological form. Subsequently, it is often advised that the resulting name can be made more suitable for a boy or a girl through its graphic form. Thus, a somewhat paradoxical situation arises in which gender-neutral names defined as suitable for children of both sexes are subsequently referred to as 'gender-neutral names (suitable/ideal) for boys' or 'gender-neutral names (suitable/ideal) for girls.' Such names are then gender-neutral in their phonological form, but their graphic form is gender-specific (specified by the namegivers), and, through the semantics of the kanji used, evokes a particular impression and intended image. In this spirit, the gender-neutral names listed or discussed on these websites are often divided into three categories: (a) gender-neutral names suitable/ideal for boys, (b) gender-neutral names suitable/ideal for girls, and (c) gender-neutral names.

What is a Gender-Neutral Name?

In the academic discourse, various definitions and designations of gender-neutral names appear. Different researchers adopt varying approaches, which may also be due to the specifics of the studied country, its legal regulations concerning naming, as well as established naming practices and conventions. In countries where names are selected from a list of approved names and boys' names can only be given to boys, and girls' names to girls (e.g., the Czech Republic), names are typically categorized as masculine and feminine and are subsequently referred to accordingly. On the other hand, in Japan and other countries where names are not limited to a stock of approved names and exclusively designated as masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral, the differentiation of established names in terms of gender is typically determined by convention, tradition, and existing practices. This distinction is often based on the presence or absence of gender-specific

features in the phonological and/or written form of names. Modern, newly created names lacking traditionally acknowledged gender-specific features are, thus, difficult to classify. Moreover, the gender distribution of a name, i.e., the popularity and association of a particular name with a specific gender, can evolve and shift over time.

Leibring (2018, pp. 306–307) differentiates between four types of names, with no fixed boundary between them. In addition to gender-specific and gender-neutral, she also recognizes gender-contrary names and gender-crossing names. Gender-contrary names are ‘names traditionally attributed to one gender but occasionally given to persons belonging to the other.’ Gender-crossing names are ‘names used mostly for individuals of one gender, but increasingly also in use for individuals of other genders.’ Although this classification clarifies that not all names borne by both men and women are necessarily gender-neutral and is useful for a general understanding of the situation, it does not provide a method for identifying such names.

According to Lieberman et al. (2000), two things must be considered: (a) ‘How equal does the gender distribution have to be in order for a name to be considered gender-neutral?’ and (b) ‘How many children need to be given a name before it can be labelled as such?’ (2000, p. 1259). In their study, a name is unambiguously androgynous (gender-neutral) if ‘each gender comprises at least one-third (and hence, no more than two-thirds) of the children bearing the name’ (2000, p. 1263) and is found at least once among the top 200 names for boys and girls, not necessarily in the same year (2000, p. 1264). However, it is evident that this second criterion cannot be universally applied to names in all countries, given the significant variation in the number of names in use. Seguin et al. (2021, p. 4) employ a different gender distribution ratio, defining girls’ and boys’ names as ‘names given to 80% or more of children of the respective gender,’ while names not meeting this criterion are categorized as androgynous.

While researchers aim to refine the general notion of what is a gender-neutral name based on various criteria, the application of these criteria and parameters may not always be consistent when studying gender-neutral names in specific countries, also due to variations in the availability and quality of data. In contrast to the United States, Japan does not offer publicly available lists of all registered birth names (Ogihara et al., 2015; Unser-Schutz, 2016b). Consequently, statistical values do not carry equal weight. The definition of what is a gender-neutral name should always be considered within the context of the country under study and with respect to the available data. In the following section, we define Japanese gender-neutral names based on the criteria of gender distribution and frequency, adapting them to our data.

Data Description

As mentioned above, acquiring a more extensive set of names for comprehensive analysis in Japan is challenging. While annual baby name rankings published by insurance, educational and other companies are available, they typically list only the top hundred names for the last several years and the top 10 names for previous years. The data used in this study comprise names of 7,411 boys and 7,647 girls born from 2008 to 2022, along with descriptions of their selection, collected from the website Baby Calendar. In addition to name rankings, this social platform encourages parents to share their babies' names and 'name selection stories' (*nazuke episōdo* in Japanese). These descriptions provide information about motivations, criteria, intended interpretations of the kanji used, etc. All examples of name selection in the following sections come from this website.

While this source provides comprehensive information, it has some limitations to be aware of. The names are solely obtained from parents who visited this website and shared their child's name selection story. Furthermore, only contributions submitted by late September or early October are published, restricting the data to children born during the first 9 months of each year.

As shown in Table 1, among the 7,411 boys, there are a total of 4,853 distinct names, while the 7,647 girls have 4,485 unique names. The average occurrence of a phonological form is only 5.26 for boys and 6.25 for girls, and the average occurrence of a graphic form is even lower, 1.7 and 1.96, respectively. This underscores the diversity of recent baby names, particularly in their graphic forms.

	Phonological	Graphic	Combination
Boys	1,408	4,371	4,853
Girls	1,224	3,906	4,485

Table 1: Distinct Phonological and Graphic Forms of Names

There are 256 different phonological forms and 333 different graphic forms present in both name sets, albeit with varying frequencies. For example, the name *Sena* exhibits a balanced gender distribution, with 25 occurrences among girls' names and 23 occurrences among boys' names, whereas the name *Sakura* substantially prevails as a name for girls (80:5) and *Haruki* as a name for boys (110:7). Likewise, in the graphic forms, 楓 demonstrates a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 18 occurrences among girls' names and 12 occurrences among boys' names, while 結月 is more prevalent among girls (22:4) and 蓮 among boys (42:4). This demonstrates that names fall along a spectrum between purely gender-specific and entirely gender-neutral, as noted by Leibring (2018).

For further analysis, we narrowed down this set of distinct phonological and graphic forms based on the following two criteria adapted from Liebersen et al. (2000) and Seguin et al. (2021): (a) the frequency of occurrence, and (b) the proportion of girls and boys given each name. Specifically, we selected phonological and graphic forms with at least an average occurrence in the dataset and a gender ratio equal to or lower than 4:1. This resulted in 39 phonological and 57 graphic forms, which we will refer to as ‘gender-neutral’ from here on (Table 2).

	Phonological	Graphic
Boys	312	1,080
Girls	301	1,139
Gender-neutral (with a gender ratio $\leq$ 4:1)	39	57

Table 2: Phonological and Graphic Forms with an Average or Above Occurrence

Characteristic Features of Gender-Neutral Names

This section discusses common characteristics of the following 39 gender-neutral phonological and 57 gender-neutral graphic forms:

*Aki, Ao, Aoba, Aoi, Asahi, Chiaki, Chihiro, Haru, Haruhi, Hinata, Iori, Ito, Kaede, Kanade, Mahiro, Mikoto, Mitsuki, Mizuki, Nagi, Nagisa, Nao, Natsu, Natsuki, Rei, Rion, Ruka, Sena, Shiki, Shion, Sora, Toa, Towa, Tsubasa, Uta, Yū, Yura, Yūri, Yuzuki*⁵

葵, 楓, 優, 心, 和, 風, 晴, 奏, 碧, 翼, 蒼, 空, 絆, 縁, 光, 明, 虹, 雅, 凌, 海, 涼, 爽, 薰, 輝, 柚希, 結心, 陽向, 光希, 琉愛, 璃音, 伊織, 優空, 星那, 優希, 春陽, 陽和, 奏音, 希望, 悠月, 愛叶, 日向, 琉夏, 結生, 結音, 充希, 叶夢, 瑠海, 遙陽, 陽希, 愛琉, 楓和, 海音, 真生, 碧海, 碧音, 那月, 陽音

Only some of the forms in the two sets create pairs (e.g., *Hinata*–日向, *Kanade*–奏, and *Sora*–空). This is because a single phonological form of a name can have multiple graphic representations (see the example of *Shion* in the introduction), and a particular graphic form can be read in various ways. While the phonological form of a name may meet our criteria for being included among gender-neutral forms, its graphic representation may not, and vice versa. Hence, we analyzed each set of gender-neutral forms separately. For the phonological forms (see the section *Phonological Forms*), we focused solely on the phonological aspects, without considering their graphic representation. Conversely, for the graphic forms (see the section *Graphic Forms*), the analysis centered on the kanji, without considering the names’ readings. Mutual relationships between the phonological

and graphic forms are addressed in the section *The Mutual Relationship Between the Phonological and Graphic Forms in a Gender-Neutral Name*. Nevertheless, as evident from their characteristics, both the phonological and graphic gender-neutral forms exhibit similarities in various aspects, including semantics.

Phonological Forms

All the names found in both name sets are either two or three morae long, which is a common length for names of both genders. Almost all names of girls and more than 80% of names of boys in the dataset consist of two or three morae. Some of these names contain no features commonly associated with one or the other gender; they have never been associated with a particular gender or lost their traditional association with men or women over time. Others contain both masculine and feminine features, or due to some circumstances, became appealing as names for both boys and girls. They can be divided into several overlapping categories based on their nature or factors that contribute to their gender-neutral character.

Bimoraic Names Corresponding to the Semantic Core of Longer Gender-Specific Names

Some of the bimoraic names popular for both boys and girls (such as *Aki*, *Haru*, *Nao*, and *Yū*) were probably motivated by longer, gender-specific names consisting of an identical bimoraic core and a usually gender-specific end syllable/morpheme (represented by one kanji in the graphic form). For instance, the gender-neutral name *Aki* corresponds to the bimoraic core of boys' names, such as *Akito*, *Akiyoshi*, and *Akiharu*, and girls' names, such as *Akie*, *Akiko*, and *Akina*. As it is the end part that makes these names gender-specific, its removal results in the loss of gender distinction.

It is worth noting that some of these bimoraic names, usually written in one of the phonographic syllabaries, were typically used for women in the past. According to the Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company, which has been publishing the 10 most popular names for girls and boys every year since 1912, the name *Haru* even ranked among the most popular names for girls during 1912–1918 (Meiji Yasuda Seimei, n.d.). However, with the widespread adoption of names ending in *-ko* (such as *Haruko* and *Akiko*) in the first half of the 20th century, these bimoraic names experienced a decline in popularity (Hashimoto and Itō, 2011; Barešová, 2020b). After several decades when the majority of names bestowed upon girls typically consisted of a bimoraic core complemented with *-ko* or some other feminine end syllable, they have regained popularity. Although some people may still perceive them as feminine, they are now considered suitable for both genders, especially among younger generations, as they have no gender-specific end syllable. Notably,

the name *Haru*, written in various kanji, has now become even more popular as a name for boys (55 occurrences among boys' names compared to 25 among girls' names in the dataset; see also the 2022 Meiji Yasuda or Baby Calendar rankings).

These bimoraic names are also easily associated with both genders as they are identical to clipped forms of those longer, gender-specific names that are commonly used as nicknames or serve as the basis for creating nicknames and hypocoristic forms (e.g., masculine names *Yūto*, *Yūta*, *Yūma* → *Yū-chan*;⁶ feminine names *Yūko*, *Yūka*, *Yūna* → *Yū-chan*). Lieberman et al. (2000, p. 1269) noted that many gender-neutral names in the United States originated from diminutive forms of names that were distinct for each gender (e.g., Jackie from both Jack and Jacqueline), or from a diminutive form of a name for one gender and an identical existing formal name for the other gender. While it is difficult to claim the same development about the discussed Japanese bimoraic names, some Japanese parents might perceive bimoraic names as diminutive in nature.

Names with a Non-gendered or Weakly Gendered End Syllable

Unlike *-to*, *-ta*, *-ma*, which are typically masculine, and *-ko*, *-ka*, *-na*, which are typically feminine, some names now given to both boys and girls contain an end syllable that is not strongly associated with either gender. The most frequent is *-ki* (e.g., *Mizuki*, *Mitsuki*, *Natsuki*, *Yuzuki*), which, with 1,470 occurrences, is the second most frequent end syllable in the dataset, preceded by the masculine *-to* and followed by the feminine *-na*. In the past, *-ki* was predominantly associated with masculine names, as documented by Watanabe (2005, p. 36). She explains that names like *Haru* and *Natsu* were feminine names, but when combined with a suffix like *-ki* (resulting in *Haruki* and *Natsuki*), they became masculine names. Although *-ki* still appears more frequently in names of boys as indicated in the dataset, over the last decade or two, the names *Haru* and *Natsu* have become gender-neutral, and the same is true for a number of names ending in *-ki*, including *Natsuki*, which has a ratio of 14:38 in favor of girls. Other end syllables, such as *-hi* (*Haruhi*), *-ba* (*Aoba*), and *-(o)n* (*Rion*, *Shion*), have become popular only recently and are not strongly associated with either gender.

Names with Meaning Associated with Neither Gender

Some phonological forms are identical to commonly used appellatives or common names of plants, and their meaning, in addition to their sound, also influences their perception in terms of gender. Those given to both boys and girls represent meanings or evoke images that are not strongly associated with either gender, express character traits and aspirations that are desirable for both boys and girls or reflect the time of birth (through seasons of the year and their typical manifestations) in a

way that is not gender specific (see examples 1 and 2, below). These include various images, such as of the sea, the sky, light, and the sun, which are found in names for both boys and girls, expressing the parents' aspirations for their child's future life and character, reflecting qualities, such as kindness, tranquillity, optimism, and inner purity. Such semantically motivated names include *Ao*, *Aoi* ('blue'), *Aoba* ('green leaves'), *Asahi* ('morning sun'), *Haru* ('spring'),⁷ *Hinata* ('sunny place'), *Kaede* ('maple'), *Nagi* ('calm (at sea)'), *Nagisa* ('water's edge'), *Natsu* ('summer'), *Sora* ('sky'), *Towa* ('eternity'), and *Tsubasa* ('wing'). Some of these names can be labelled as 'retro' names, as they are reminiscent of older times and/or old, traditional names, often semantically associated with the Japanese domestic culture, e.g., *Aoi* ('hollyhock'), *Chihiro* ('great depth/height'), *Mikoto* ('Lord/Highness'), *Uta* ('song/poem').

1. Parents named their daughter, born in the autumn of 2009, *Kaede* 楓 ('maple') because they wanted a name inspired by nature. They thought of the vibrant red leaves of the maple tree in the autumn season, which bring enjoyment. With this name, they expressed their hope that their daughter would become a source of joy for others, enriching their lives just like a maple tree.

2. A mother named her son, born in 2020, *Kaede* 楓 ('maple') because her due date was September 20, and she wanted a name related to the autumn season. Inspired by the vivid imagery of autumn's red leaves, she chose this name with the wish that her child's life would be as colorful as the maple tree amid the autumn foliage.

It is worth noting that the various meanings conveyed through the phonological form and the meanings expressed through the kanji in which it is written may differ. As shown in example 3, the graphic form often conveys additional meanings, enriching the name with another dimension, and sometimes also gender specification (see also the sections *Gender-Neutral Names in Public Discourse* and *The Mutual Relationship between the Phonological and Graphic Forms in a Gender-Neutral Name*).

3. A mother named her son, born in 2018, *Sora* ('sky') wishing for him to have a heart as beautiful and big as the sky. Since he often kicked her when she was singing, she chose a kanji combination related to music, 奏良 ('play music' + 'good'), hoping that he would bring energy and joy to people around him, much like music does.

Names Associated with Both Genders

Some names are perceived as suitable for both boys and girls, as they possess features that make them associated with both genders. For example, the name *Iori* was originally bestowed only upon boys. Its resemblance to names such as *Kaori*

and *Shiori*, typically given to girls, and the end syllable *-ri*, which more frequently appears in girls' names than boys' names, can make the name feel feminine. At the same time, its masculine image is maintained due to a well-known bearer of this name, a 17th-century samurai Miyamoto Iori, now a popular anime character.

Monothematic two-mora names such as *Ito* and *Uta* were typically names for girls more than a century ago (as were the above-mentioned *Haru* and *Natsu*). Nowadays, *-ta* and *-to* are mostly perceived as masculine end syllables, which can make these names appealing for boys as well.

Another factor that contributes to the unisex character of some of the analyzed names is their resemblance with a foreign name or word. The name may be used in other countries as gender-neutral or it may be used for the opposite gender to the one it is associated with in Japan. Thus, the gender-neutrality of such a name can be achieved by a combination of two factors, usually phonological and pragmatic or semantic. The name *Ruka*, for example, contains an end syllable typical of Japanese feminine names, indicating the usability of this name for girls. At the same time, it evokes the Italian boy's name *Lucca*⁸, which indicates the usability of this name for boys. The name selection stories collected with the names indicate that the name *Yūri* sounds soft and feminine due to the end syllable, but it is also associated with the Russian masculine name *Yury* (*Yuri*, *Yuriy*). The name *Sena* ends in a syllable that is strongly associated with girls' names in Japan. However, when given to boys, it is usually motivated by the Brazilian race car driver *Ayrton Senna*, i.e., the surname of a famous sportsman. The name *Rion* is sometimes associated with lions when given to a boy.

Graphic Forms

All 57 gender-neutral graphic forms are written in kanji, and all of them are either single-kanji or two-kanji names. Hiragana is generally associated with names for girls (6.1% of girls' names compared to 0.2% of boys' names in the dataset), and katakana is rarely used in contemporary names (less than 0.5% of names in the dataset). The analyzed names consist of 50 different kanji with meanings not strongly associated with a specific gender. Some of the 24 listed single-kanji names were previously used as boys' names (e.g., 優 *Masaru*, now pronounced as *Yū*, and 明 *Akira*, now usually pronounced as *Mei* or *Akari*), or were traditionally used for both genders (e.g., 薫 *Kaoru* or *Kaori*, and 光 *Hikaru* or *Hikari*). However, many of these kanji gained popularity only in the last few decades of the 20th century. Sixteen were newly added to the list of kanji approved for use in names, which contributed to their rise in popularity. 葵, 瑠, 悠, and 那 were added in 1976, while 楓, 碧, 虹, 璃, and 遥 followed in 1981. In 1990, 風, 蒼, 凌, 爽, 柚, and 叶 were included, and 琉 in 1997. It was during this period that single-kanji names also became increasingly common for girls.

The popularity of the kanji used in the analyzed names is evident through recent baby name rankings, as well as rankings specifically focusing on kanji used in names (see, e.g., Baby Calendar, Meiji Yasuda, etc.). For example, 28 out of the 50 kanji appear among the top 100 kanji for both boys' and girls' names in the 2022 ranking by Baby Calendar. Furthermore, six kanji appear in the top 100 kanji for girls' names, and another six appear in the top 100 kanji for boys' names.

The Role of the Selected Kanji

Kanji used in names are typically chosen to represent the phonological form of a name and convey specific meanings. As illustrated in examples 4 and 5, these meanings can allude to particular places, people, or events (e.g., the time, place, or circumstances of birth), and directly or metaphorically represent desired future qualities or aspirations for the child.

4. Parents named their son, born in 2010, *Kaito* 海音 ('sea' + 'sound') because the father is a fisherman, and both parents love the sea. They also enjoy listening to the sound of sea waves. Furthermore, they hope their son will grow up to have a heart as big as the sea.

5. Parents named their daughter, born in 2018, *Amane* 海音 ('sea' + 'sound'). They chose these kanji because both the parents and her two older siblings love the sea, and they want her to become a person who cherishes nature and leads a happy life.

However, in some cases, kanji are primarily selected for their reading, with their meaning being of secondary importance. For example, 希 ('hope/wish'), which is not strongly associated with a particular gender, is frequently seen to represent the gender-neutral (or weakly gendered) end syllable *-ki* (discussed in the section *Names with a Non-gendered or Weakly Gendered End Syllable*). Likewise, 陽 ('sun'), which also lacks gender-specific connotations, is often used as an end kanji to represent *-hi*.

Additionally, kanji are chosen for the specific number of strokes believed to be auspicious. The number of strokes in various kanji combinations in both the given name and the family name is believed to determine the name bearer's fate and personality (e.g., Nakagawa, 1996), and it is a long-standing, highly considered factor for namegivers (e.g., Miki House Henshūbu, 2022).

It depends on each kanji and also the namegiver, which aspect gets more weight in a particular name. Some kanji are conventionally used in names. Their combination may represent a common noun that has been turned into a name, such as 日向 *Hinata*, which means 'sunny place.' Some kanji combinations have been used as names for centuries, and the meaning of individual kanji is no longer clear (e.g., 伊織 *Iori*).

Characteristics of Kanji Used Mainly Semantically

The kanji used in the analyzed graphic forms for their meaning, whether or not it is the primary motivation, can be divided into two main semantic groups. The larger group consists of 29 kanji related to the natural world (e.g., 海 ‘sea’, 空 ‘sky’, 陽 ‘sun’, 楓 ‘maple’, and 葵 ‘hollyhock’). These characters began to gain popularity in names in the 1990s (Makino, 2012, p. 83–84) and have remained popular since. They are used not only for the meanings they denote but also for the various associations and images they evoke. The second, smaller group comprises 17 kanji representing abstract phenomena related directly to human qualities, emotions, human life, and relationships (e.g., 優 ‘gentle/kind’, 愛 ‘love’, 心 ‘heart’, 夢 ‘dream’, 望 ‘desire’), or actions, and activities (e.g., 結 ‘tie/bind’, 叶 ‘fulfil’). Some of them serve to semantically complement or support a semantically dominant kanji belonging to the first group.

Many of the kanji express, whether directly or metaphorically, human qualities and values that are desired for both boys and girls. The most prominent among these is *yasashisa*—kindness/gentleness—and related qualities, such as good-heartedness, friendliness, optimism, and values related to interpersonal relationships, as demonstrated in examples 6, 7, and 8 below, and 4 in the section *The Role of the Selected Kanji*. Many human qualities (such as strength or beauty) are associated with a particular gender (masculine or feminine), and, thus, they are primarily found in gender-specific names.

6. A mother named her son, born in 2014, *Yū* 優 (‘kind’) because her husband is a kind man and that is why she married him. She hopes that her son will grow up to be a kind-hearted person above all else.

7. Parents named their daughter, born in 2018, *Nagi* 凪 (‘calm at sea’) with the hope that she would grow up to be as calm and kind/gentle as the morning and evening calm over the ocean.

As discussed in the section *Names Associated with Both Genders*, in addition to the desired character traits and the parents’ aspirations for their child’s future, specific references to the time or season of the child’s birth or references to various aspects of the child’s family are also often expressed through the graphic form, through kanji that are not strongly associated with either gender (see also the section *The Role of the Selected Kanji*, including examples 4 and 5, and also examples 6 and 8).

8. Parents named their daughter, born in 2012, *Haru* 晴 (‘clear weather’) because she was born on a sunny day during the rainy season when the

downpours finally cleared up. They named her in hopes that her life would be as bright and positive as the clear sky and that she would grow up to bring cheerfulness to people around her.

The Mutual Relationship Between the Phonological and Graphic Forms in a Gender-Neutral Name

As shown in the example of *Shion* (see *Introduction*), a gender-neutral phonological form can be represented by a gender-specific graphic form. Gender-neutral names with spelling variations that are gender specific can also be found in English-speaking countries, e.g., Francis–Frances (Lieberson et al., 2000). Because of the use of kanji and the way in which Japanese names are selected, a single phonological form of a name can be written not only in two or three variations but often in numerous forms, each of which may be associated with a particular gender. This can be demonstrated with three more examples from the dataset: *Mahiro* (e.g., 優大 and 雅拓 for boys, まひろ and 茉央 for girls), *Natsuki* (e.g., 夏樹 and 那樹 for boys, 菜月 and 夏姫 for girls) and *Uta* (生汰 and 詩太 for boys, うた and 優珠 for girls). Some of the kanji used are strongly associated with men (e.g., 大 ‘large/big’, 太 ‘big around/grand’, and 拓 ‘to clear/cultivate’) or women (e.g., 姫 ‘princess’, 茉 ‘jasmine’, and 珠 ‘pearl/jewel’). *Hiragana* (e.g., うた, まひろ) is another means of making a name look feminine. This type of name is what the various baby name websites call gender-neutral names ideal for boys or girls (see the section *Gender-Neutral Names in Public Discourse*).

However, unlike names written in the Latin alphabet, some Japanese names are gender-neutral in their written form but gender-specific in their phonological form. The distinctions between masculine and feminine phonological forms of a gender-neutral graphic form include the following: a single-kanji name with a Sino-Japanese reading is more commonly associated with boys, while the Japanese reading is preferred for girls’ names: e.g., 心 (*Shin/Jin* for boys—*Kokoro/Koko* for girls). A single-kanji name with a Japanese reading corresponding to a verbal form ending in *-u* is usually used for boys, while a nominal form ending in *-i* is usually used as a girls’ name, e.g., 和 (*Nagomu–Nagomi*). Some verbal forms are also used for girls: e.g., *Ayumu* and *Hikaru*. Additionally, certain kanji used at the end position represent different, gender-specific sounds in boys’ and girls’ names. For example, 音 is often read *-to* in boys’ names, but *-ne* in girls’ names: e.g., 海音 (*Kaito–Amane*). While the first two distinctions can also be found in older names (e.g., Sakuma, 1964), two readings of an end kanji, each distinct for each gender, is a characteristic of more recent names.

Some of the currently popular names are truly gender-neutral, i.e., they are gender-neutral in their phonological, as well as graphic form. These are mainly

single-kanji names (Aoi 葵, 碧, 蒼; Haru 晴; Kaede 楓; Nagi 凪; Kanade 奏; Sora 空; Tsubasa 翼; Yū 優) that are often semantically transparent (such as Sora meaning the sky, or Kaede meaning a maple). Two-kanji names that are gender-neutral in both aspects are usually names with a traditional or conventional graphic form, such as the above-mentioned Hinata (日向, 陽向) and Iori (伊織).

Discussion

Contemporary Japanese names differ from those given to babies in the 20th century in many ways, but they still largely express gender, although often through different means. Additionally, there are names that do not indicate gender in their phonological and/or graphic forms. While they represent a minority, their visibility is increasing.

Many names that are gender-neutral in their phonological form have emerged only recently and, as such, are not constrained by traditional gender stereotypes. Others, which were associated with one gender in the past, have re-emerged after a period of decline in use, during which their historical gender associations weakened (as demonstrated on the example of Haru). In some cases, these names have distinct origins for each gender (exemplified by Ruka and Yūri). Regarding their structure and semantics, many of these names are monothematic and correspond to common Japanese appellatives. Some of the names resemble diminutive forms of longer, gender-specific names, while others bear a resemblance to foreign names.

Another feature shared by many of these currently popular gender-neutral names is their association with various celebrities and popular fictional characters from manga and anime. To gain wide acceptance as gender-neutral, it is crucial for a name originally associated with only one gender to be publicly used by the opposite gender. Furthermore, many of the popular fictional characters possess both masculine and feminine traits, making them more easily associated with both genders (Barešová, 2020a).

The typical length for gender-neutral graphic forms is one or two kanji. Most of the kanji involved have been used in names relatively recently, and their meanings are often associated with nature and the natural world. A smaller number refer directly to selected abstract phenomena related to human character, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. The future qualities of a named child conveyed either directly or metaphorically through the graphic form of gender-neutral names include kindness, gentleness, and related qualities, and values associated with interpersonal relationships.

Some kanji are used in names for both boys and girls, even though they traditionally connote more feminine or masculine qualities and are typically used

in gender-specific names. On the basis of the name selection stories in our dataset, it can be argued that, in such cases, the original gendered characteristics may be overlooked. Instead, the namegivers prioritize specific semantic references on a personal level, such as the circumstances of birth or various family aspects. The stories also reveal the namegivers' awareness of the stereotypical characteristics associated with the kanji (as they mention these themselves). However, they choose the name or graphic form in question because other motivations for selecting it for the opposite gender outweigh stereotypical considerations.

Similar to the phonological form of a name, the stereotypical associations of a particular kanji with a specific gender are often challenged by its use in the name of a (fictional) character of the opposite gender in popular culture works or in the name of a well-known person in the real world. This makes the name more acceptable for use as a name for the opposite gender.

It is important to note that these characteristics and tendencies in phonological and graphic forms can also be observed in a broader range of names within our dataset, i.e., including names with a lower frequency of occurrence or less balanced gender distribution.

The analyzed 39 different gender-neutral phonological forms represent a total of 1,575 names, making up 10.46% of the 15,058 names in the dataset. The 57 gender-neutral graphic forms account for 623 names, or 4.14%. The overall popularity of a particular name, as well as its popularity with a specific gender, changes over time. Only a few names achieve simultaneous popularity among both genders (Barry and Harper, 1993; Lieberman et al., 2000). In this context, these seemingly modest numbers carry significance, especially considering that the analysis spans a mere 15-year period.

When we consider phonological forms that appear at least twice for each gender in the dataset, accounting for the possibility of one occurrence being a mistake (i.e., including names that Leibring (2018) calls gender-crossing and gender-contrary), we find an additional 3,971 names (26.37%). Similarly, we identify 1,089 names for the graphic form (7.23%). Notably, graphic forms of names not only exhibit greater diversity than phonological forms but also appear to be more frequently gendered. However, it is important to note that more than one-third of all the graphic forms (5,712, i.e., 37.93%) have only one occurrence in the dataset, either for a boy or for a girl, and many of them cannot be clearly determined as masculine or feminine.

The great diversity of recently given names, which also contributes to a higher number of names not clearly indicating gender, is closely related to the process of name selection. Traditionally, the primary focus, especially in names for boys, was on the written form, meaning that the process typically began with the selection of a desired kanji (Kobayashi, 2009). For names that were not intended to consist of a

single kanji (more common for boys in the past), it was usually complemented with a kanji (or kanji combination) based on a chosen name pattern, which was usually gender-specific. The reading of the name was determined by the readings of the kanji used. Since the last decades of the 20th century, it became increasingly common to start with the phonological form and consequently assign kanji to it.⁹ This inverted process, combined with an increasing need for uniqueness and originality, led to a decrease in traditional gender-specific name patterns and an emergence of a great variety of new names that employ uncommon phonological forms, including those rarely used by the previous generations, foreign-sounding, or newly invented. They also utilize rarely used kanji or unusual kanji combinations, which are not often associated with any gender.

The low number of truly gender-neutral names, as defined in our study, is also partly related to this overall development and the general scarcity of names that have both the same phonological and graphic form. When parents opt for a more popular phonological form, they often strive to make the name more distinctive by choosing a less common graphic form. Furthermore, they customize it for the particular child, for example, by choosing kanji that, when combined with those in the surname, result in auspicious stroke counts.

The recent rise in popularity of names that are not tied to a particular gender can also be viewed as a reflection of societal needs. Throughout the 20th century, Japanese names, whether for boys or girls, were influenced by challenges, desires, and needs arising during economic recessions and, conversely, periods of prosperity (Makino, 2012), as well as the advancement of women's emancipation and the decreasing number of children within families (Unser-Schutz, 2019; Barešová and Janda, 2023), among other factors. Social phenomena influencing current name selection include the aforementioned growing individualism, globalization, and an increasing emphasis on gender equality. Mindful of these developments, parents may, for example, intentionally select names that will be easy to pronounce and remember within the global community and, as illustrated in the explanation for selecting the name *Shion*, names that do not confine the bearer within traditional gender boundaries. It will, therefore, be interesting to observe how the ongoing transformation of social preferences manifests in names and their structure, especially concerning the rising generation.

Conclusion

Gender-neutral forms, described and discussed in this article, stand out as prominent examples of a broader trend observed in Japanese naming: the blurring of once-clear boundaries between boys' and girls' names. While truly gender-neutral names remain relatively uncommon, the prevalence of phonological and

graphic forms bestowed upon both boys and girls is substantial. This phenomenon must be viewed within the context of the aforementioned broader changes in name selection and naming practices over the past few decades, closely mirroring developments in Japanese society.

Gender-neutral naming in Japan has its specifics that are related, among other things, to the use of kanji, making it possible to have the resultant name gender-neutral only in its phonological or graphic form. On the other hand, some aspects directly related to the origin or characteristics of Japanese gender-neutral names, such as the influence of foreign names or hypocoristic forms, can also be observed in other cultures (e.g., Lieberman et al., 2000; Vlahova, this issue).

In the course of our research, we became increasingly aware of a related issue noted by Makino (2017) and also noticed by Barešová (2020a), regarding the increasing use of feminine features in boys' names, particularly kanji with meanings more commonly associated with women than men. The evolution of this phenomenon and its implications raise intriguing questions for further investigation.

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Notes

1. Japanese is transcribed here using the Hepburn system of romanization, which follows English pronunciation. Long vowels are transcribed using the macron.
2. The Japanese language utilizes a complex writing system that combines several distinct scripts. Generally speaking, kanji are employed to write the stems of content words, while hiragana is usually used for function words, verbal and adjectival suffixes, etc. Katakana is primarily used today for non-Chinese loanwords. Because of historical development, each kanji often has one or more Sino-Japanese and native Japanese readings, including additional readings that are used exclusively in names. For example, the kanji 音 ('sound'), which represents /on/ in the name *Shion* 士音, can also be read as /oto/ (*Otoha* 音葉), /ne/ (*Amane* 天音), /to/ (*Ryūto* 琉音), or /o/ (*Rio* 莉音).
3. The only limitations pertain to orthography; however, a recent legislative revision, which went into effect in 2024, imposes some restrictions on the readings of names (e.g., Kiyonaga, 2023).
4. The phonological length of words in Japanese is typically considered in terms of the number of morae (Kubozono, 2015). A mora consists of a vowel, which can be preceded by an optional consonant. It may also consist of a moraic nasal (/N/) or a moraic obstruent (/Q/). The name *Shion* consists of three morae: /shi.o.N/.
5. The phonological form *Yuzuki* is counted twice, as it is represented in hiragana as ゆずき and ゆづき. This distinction is typically based on the kanji used to write the

- name, but both variants are pronounced in the same way in modern Japanese. The same applies to *Mizuki*, but only the hiragana representation みずき had a balanced gender distribution in our dataset.
6. *-chan* is a diminutive suffix expressing intimacy and affection.
 7. This name is also often chosen for its association with the sun as /haru/ is one of the readings of 陽 ('sunshine') in names.
 8. Japanese lacks a clear distinction between the /l/ and /r/ sounds found in languages like English. Instead, it features a single sound that can be perceived as somewhere in between the two.
 9. For a detailed explanation of the reasons behind this shift, see Kobayashi (2009).

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The Role of Baby-Naming Guides in the Presentation of Gender in Names: A Case Study of the Tamahiyo Baby Naming Guides

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ABSTRACT: Although gender-neutral Japanese names may be becoming more common than in previous generations (Satō, 2007), data also suggest that new gender-based naming patterns are emerging (Unser-Schutz, 2023). With their ever-growing numbers, baby-naming guides may play an important, but underexamined, role in changing names for children and people's perceptions of gender in names. This article fills this gap by 1) analyzing how gender is discussed in the advice and 2) analyzing kanji [Chinese characters] for names suggested in two editions of the guides by the popular Tamahiyo childrearing brand. Although there are few explicit discussions of gender, closer inspection reveals gender to be treated as an a priori category. The guides also make many assumptions about boys' and girls' names. The more recent edition was more authoritative in voice and less balanced in its assignment of gendered names across semantic image categories, creating distinctly gendered patterns. Given the otherwise high-level of innovativeness of Tamahiyo (Kobayashi, 2009), these results confirm that conservative trends toward gendered naming remain strong. Changes in Tamahiyo's voice may be explained by consumer demand, backlash toward recent naming trends, and its maturation in childrearing discourse over time.

KEYWORDS: Japanese, baby-naming guides, kanji, gendered names, child-rearing ideology, Tamahiyo

Introduction

Like many countries discussed in this issue, it has been suggested that gender-neutral names are becoming more common in contemporary Japan (Barešová, 2020; Satō, 2007). This comes as naming practices have gone through massive changes visible throughout Japan over the last 30 years (Unser-Schutz, 2017),

with a rise in highly unique names which use *kanji* [Chinese characters] in ways that make them difficult to read (Satō, 2007). Popular response to these names has been poor, and they have become known as *kirakira nēmu* [glittery names] for being overly unique (Unser-Schutz, 2016). Many of these changes have been related to how names indicate gender: Especially in the early and mid-20th century, many Japanese names were clearly identifiable through gendered name-exclusive suffixes. However, many of these suffixes, particularly *-ko* for girls, have slowly declined, since the 1960s, but more dramatically since the 1990s (e.g., Hashimoto and Itō, 2011; Kawagishi, 2013; Komori, 2002). These changes have been raised as an issue by the media since the early 2000s, with news articles lamenting how new naming trends could have a dangerous effect on children, with new, unique names being a potential handicap for them socially (reviewed in Unser-Schutz, 2016). Likewise, although a somewhat nebulous term, mismatches between names and their bearers' genders are often listed as a quality of *kirakira nēmu* (e.g., Yamanishi et al., 2016).

Previous research suggests that these new names are associated with a rise in individualistic traits and that these changes correspond with shifts from a collectivist society to an individualistic society (Kobayashi, 2009; Ogihara et al., 2015); similarly, increased diversity in names has also been associated with rising individualism in the United States (Twenge et al., 2010), suggesting that naming practices may be a common indication of individualistic or collectivist traits in a society. Likewise, one can hypothesize that changes in the way that gender is represented in names is related to changes in people's perception of gender in society, which has greatly transformed in recent years. One must then ask how information about how names should express gender is disseminated in society, and how changes therein are evaluated. However, most research on Japanese naming practices has focused on quantitative analyses of ranked data sets (Hirayama, 2011), school records (Komori, 2002), or municipal newsletters (Satō, 2007), leaving questions unanswered about how new naming practices are spread and evaluated throughout society.

As a popular resource when choosing names, baby-naming guides may play an important, but underexamined, role in these changes. Today, there are increasingly large numbers of books and websites offering practical information about naming trends. This proliferation may reflect people's increased efforts to find the perfect name (Smith, 2009); it may also reflect the shift to the nuclear family in baby naming (Unser-Schutz, 2019), whereby parents have fewer intergenerational familial resources to utilize. Such guides and magazines appear to have played a distinctive role in spreading contemporary trends in Japan (Kobayashi, 2009); as expert, authoritative resources, such guides form a major part of child-rearing

discourse. However, apart from Watanabe (2005), who reviewed common naming principles found in guides, few researchers have focused on the discourse of guides themselves.

To examine the role baby-naming guides play in the changing public perception of gender in names, I report on an analysis of the paper book-length guides published by the Tamahiyo group as an outgrowth of the popular *Tamago Club* magazine for expectant mothers, which Kobayashi (2009) has argued have been particularly influential. Given that Tamahiyo is celebrating their 30th year anniversary at the time of writing in 2023 (Tamahiyo, 2023a), it is prime time to overview their role in naming and the reproduction of gender in Japan. After reviewing the characteristics of Tamahiyo and *Tamago Club*, in the following sections, I discuss the results of two analyses: first, a qualitative discourse analysis of text discussing gender within the advice of the guides, and second, a quantitative analysis of differences in the semantic images suggested for boys and girls. Finally, I discuss what these results suggest about Tamahiyo's role in the spreading of gender-neutral names.

The Role of Tamahiyo and *Tamago Club*

Derived from *tamago* [eggs] and *hiyoko* [chicks], Tamahiyo is a catchall name for informational products, including but not limited to, paper magazines, smart-phone applications, online shops, and photo studios for expectant mothers and mothers of young children by Benesse, a major Japanese educational company. The magazine *Tamago Club* was first published in November 1993 and focuses on supplying information that expectant mothers might need, including trends and advice about how to select and register names. Its printing run has been the highest among similar magazines (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 27), but magazines such as *Tamago Club* and other child-rearing magazines are not something readers will consistently buy over time. Rather, as Shionoya et al. (2007) suggest, they are more likely to be something one would pick up when needed.

The quarterly magazine *Tamago Club* encourages reader participation, which is reflected in Tamahiyo's active collection and publication of reader naming information. The magazines often feature special columns on naming, and from 2005, ranked naming information has also been published on their website (Benesse, 2023). Since 2003, they have also published the *Tamahiyo akachan no shiawase namae jiten* [*The Tamahiyo happy baby names dictionary*] (see Table 1), a paper-only guide published approximately once a year, widely available in bookstores and libraries. Since 2009, they have also published separate gendered editions. Although called a *jiten* 'dictionary/encyclopedia', the guides are not dictionaries in the traditional sense, as in addition to naming lists, they provide lengthy advice

Type	Editions published	Year published	
		First	Most recent
General naming guide	19	7/2003	11/2023
Girls' naming guide	4	7/2009	1/2023
Boys' naming guide	4	7/2009	1/2023
Oversized editions*	4	2/2011	5/2017
Total	31		

*Oversized editions present largely identical data from the general naming guides in a larger-sized format.

Table 1: Editions of Tamahiyo Paper Guides Under the *Tamahiyo Happy Baby Names Dictionary* Name

and are shelved in the child-rearing sections in bookstores. As such, I refer to them throughout as the ‘Tamahiyo guides’. Note that the website does not include the paper guide’s advice and nonranked data, and the paper guides include little of the ranking information from the website.

At approximately 500 pages, the Tamahiyo guides provide both practical advice (e.g., on legal naming regulations, the process to register names at city hall) and subjective advice (e.g., how to choose and evaluate names), as well as lists of names for inspiration under different themes (e.g., by sound or by kanji image), most of which are unranked. One of the major characteristics of the guides is that they are concerned with finding a *happy* (or *good luck*) name. The series focuses explicitly on fortune telling surrounding the number of strokes needed to write the kanji used in names. This emphasis on happiness is typical of Japanese baby naming resources (Barešová, 2016), and all of the editions have had name fortune tellers for supervising editors: from 2003 until 2011, Norio Tamiya, and later, Rioko Kurihara. The contents of the series reflect this, with large sections on fortune telling, but no major changes could be found in the guides’ contents following the change in supervising editors.

The Tamahiyo guides play a dual role in the construction of childrearing discourse and the production and monitoring of change in names. Childrearing magazines and guides become attached to the visible and invisible power relationships and have symbolic control by shaping gender categories (Tendo and Takahashi, 2016, p. 12). Through the information they provide, the Tamahiyo guides can influence people’s beliefs about who should be involved in naming and how names should represent gender. *Tamago Club* presents itself as a magazine for modern mothers, emphasizing empathy and connections between readers and their ‘true feelings’ about child-rearing through reader involvement in the magazines (e.g., photographs or surveys) (Tendo, 2004, p. 34–35). Yet *Tamago Club* is still conservative regarding familial roles and relationships (Ishikawa, 2013)

and emphasizes child-rearing as a mission-oriented, high-stakes task requiring constant attention (Ishimaru, 2019). As an offshoot of *Tamago Club*, the Tamahiyo guides likely have a similar stance.

As a part of child-rearing discourse, Tamahiyo also actively plays an active role through the collection and curation of names. Given the lack of publicly available government records on names in Japan, the data collected by Tamahiyo have become an invaluable resource often used to follow onomastic trends (e.g., Hirayama, 2011); even changes in how Tamahiyo collects data have been researched (Ogihara, 2022). Although the ranking data presented on the website may be objective, the nonranking data of various lists of names that the article guides present for inspiration is actively curated by Tamahiyo. They have no obligation to be public with their methodology and do not list objective reasons for why names were selected for inclusion (or removal). One must assume such choices reflect Tamahiyo's ideas of how names should be; thus, their analysis can also reveal Tamahiyo's hidden ideology.

With its emphasis on reader participation, Tamahiyo's influence is also circular in nature. Readers of the Tamahiyo guides may be influenced by its advice and name lists and are then encouraged to submit their own data after their child has been born; naming data are also collected from parents using other Tamahiyo services. Submitted names enter the database that Tamahiyo uses for their yearly ranking data and to choose names for future guides. In this way, names that are influenced by Tamahiyo become a part of Tamahiyo, such that the Tamahiyo names over time may more reflect other names in Tamahiyo and their ideology. Although not all expectant parents buy Tamahiyo guides, the ranking data are free to view; Tamahiyo's website came first on a recent November 10, 2023, Google search for *namae + ranking* [names + ranking] by the author. Even nonreaders simply curious about naming trends are likely to come upon Tamahiyo data, expanding its influence.

Of course, the Tamahiyo guides are not the only ones on the market. However, Tamahiyo stands out on several points. First, being published by Benesse means it is part of the child-rearing discourse of a much larger institution, giving it a wider reach than guides from traditional publishers. One may still end up using Benesse products without seeking them out: For example, Benesse has established nursing stations in many public places under the Tamahiyo name, which have bookshelves with their magazines. Second, among all such guides, it is by far the longest and most updated series; most guides have been infrequently updated. This makes it uniquely possible to observe how their discourse has changed. Finally, the Tamahiyo guides have been specifically suggested to have had a unique role in the current naming trends (e.g., Kobayashi, 2009) and are among the most popular

on the market: Editions of the guides accounted for 16 of the 50 bestselling baby name guides recently on Amazon.jp (2024), with similar percentages on sites such as Seven Net Shopping (2024).

Methodology

The current article focuses on two editions of the Tamahiyo guides: the original 2003 edition (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003), and the 2023–2024 edition (Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022), the most recent at the time of research. I selected the combined editions, as this allows for the inclusion of the influential original 2003 edition and because they form the core of the Tamahiyo baby naming guides, having been updated most years since then, thus allowing for an analysis of change over a larger span of time (19 years). Although the separate gendered editions likely have much to reveal, the combined editions may also make more direct comparisons as they specifically approach boys' and girls' names together. I collected data in two ways. First, to analyze naming advice information concerning gender, I conducted a qualitative discourse analysis, going through both editions to look for statements describing, comparing, or implying characteristics of boys' versus girls' names. Text that simply listed examples of boys' or girls' names or that noted characteristics equally common for both genders were removed. As much of the text is repeated throughout both editions, when comparing largely identical extracts, I indicate text only found in the 2003 edition through underlining, and text only found in 2023–2024 edition through boxes.

As not all assumptions Tamahiyo makes are likely verbalized, I also conducted a second, quantitative analysis of the name lists, focusing on (a) the full list of matched phonological/graphic names in the section for choosing names through sound, which was the largest list of names in both editions (12,661 names from the 2003 edition and 8,518 from the 2023–2024 edition) and likely the guide's primary reference list for parents, and (b) the number of names in the lists of names organized by semantic image categories, 55 of which were found in both editions. The quantitative analysis complements the qualitative by exploring the consistency between Tamahiyo's explicit stance toward gender and the names listed for boys and girls. For example, if the qualitative analysis indicates that Tamahiyo has a positive stance toward gender-neutral names, one might expect a high number of such names; not having such might indicate that they were not as receptive as claimed.

Results

Qualitative Analysis: Changes Between 2003 and 2023–2024

Most content categories (i.e., on the header level) were identical or similar between editions. However, the 2023–2024 edition was shorter in length, at 485 pages

compared to 515. Most of this is accounted for by the later edition's lack of personalized parents' reports, which were a characteristic of the original edition. This may indicate a movement away from the 'typical' Tamahiyo participatory style and may be related to the growth of Tamahiyo's data set, which recently became exponentially larger (Ogihara, 2022), as Tamahiyo has become more of an authoritative resource on child-rearing and names.

One consistent characteristic of the guides has been that most lists of names are preorganized by gender. The lists are divided into several categories, with lists categorized by sound; the number of kanji strokes; and the semantic images kanji evoke. The 2023–2024 edition also includes an expanded recommended kanji section. The original edition includes on its cover pictures of readers' children, and their gender is semi-explicitly noted using the honorifics *kun* and *chan*; although neither are obligatorily gendered, they are frequently used differentially for boys and girls, respectively. This, like most reader stories was removed in later editions, and the cover of the 2023–2024 includes no such photos. From the 2013 edition onward, *otoko no ko & onna no ko* [boys & girls] has been included in the subtitle of the series, yet overall, both editions avoid explicit discussions of gender. No section exclusively describes what makes names 'masculine' or 'feminine,' nor what makes names gender neutral; only 18 instances discussing gender across both guides could be found (see Table 2).

Most of these comments concerned general advice about the scripts used in names, specifically *hiragana*, one of two phonetic syllabaries used along with *katakana*. Although in example (1), they describe hiragana as a common characteristic of girls' names, a point noted elsewhere (e.g., Taylor and Taylor, 1995), in example (2), they suggest it is fine for boys, and predict it will become more frequent, indicating they see increasing similarities between boys' and girls' names. Both editions also comment in example (3) on the increases in gender-neutral names and include lists of such names. However, while they write it is a trend of *koko sūnen* [the last several years], they do not state the period in either edition, even though there is nearly 20 years between editions. This suggests that the trend of gender-neutral names has long been sensed to be burgeoning but has not yet penetrated enough to no longer appear unusual.

How these are listed is a major difference. The 2003 edition focuses on graphic forms (e.g., the written form of the name independent of phonological information) with multiple readings, undifferentiated for gender, whereas the 2023–2024 edition gives common phonological forms with alternative graphic forms, differentiated for gender (see Table 3). Tamahiyo's belief that hiragana is for girls is clear from the multiple girls' hiragana graphic forms (ひなた, そら, あさひ, りん, and るい), and the lack of such boys' names. This can be seen in example (2), where

Number	Comments	Page		Note
		2003 edition	2023–2024 edition	
1	Lists popular gender-neutral names	27	27	Explanation largely identical, listing method changed: See example (3), Table 3
2, 3	States hiragana is an option for girls	28, 34	28, 34	Both identical: See example (1) for text from p. 28
4	Suggests girls' names more likely to be longer when written with kanji	29	29	Identical
5	States girls' names often use plant imagery with list	32	32	Identical
6	Gives name in kanji with multiple readings noting gender may be unclear; no explanation of how to tell	38	38	Largely identical
7	Cautions about trendy gender-neutral names	40	40	Largely identical: See example (4)
8	Cautions about gender switches when using foreign names	41	41	Identical
9	Says more kanji appropriate for boys than for girls; suggests hiragana as choice for girls	44	44	Identical
10	Comments using kanji regardless of meaning for single-syllable sounds have been common for girls, but also recommends it for boys	45	45	Largely identical
11	Recommends hiragana/katakana names for boys for uniqueness	46	46	Identical: See example (2)
12	Reader asks about names changing after marriage; advice suggests avoiding thinking about it too much	57	57	Reader information and text identical
13	Reader asks if hiragana is too soft for boys; advice says hiragana is good for girls because they do not need to be caught up by kanji semantics, but can be good for boys	59	59–60	Reader information and majority of text identical
14	States male names more likely to misuse kanji meanings	61	61	Identical
15	Suggests what to prioritize with name fortune telling, as girls may change family name through marriage	75		
16	Claims boys' names use 'wood' sounds more than girls	284	76	Identical
17	Claims 'water' sounds are one of most popular sounds for girls	285	77	Identical
18	Comments on frequency of hiragana among women in list of actors' names		449	
19	Cautions about gender switches when using foreign names	486	470	Identical
	Total number of comments	18	18	

Table 2: All Mentions Within Text to Comparisons or Descriptions of Gender in Names

2023–2024 edition										
2003 edition						Possible graphic forms				
Ranking	Graphic form	Possible phonological forms				Phonological form	For boys		For girls	
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th		1	2	1	2
1	凜	Rin				Aoi	蒼	葵生	葵	青依
2	優希	Yūki	Hiroki	Yuki		Hinata	陽向	日向	ひなた	日菜多
3	優	Yū	Suguru	Kokoro	Masaru	Haru	晴	陽	葉瑠	春
4	悠	Yū	Haruka			Rio	理央	莉生	莉緒	梨央
5	光	Hikaru	Hikari	Kō	Akira	Sora	空	昊	そら	蒼良
6	楓	Kaede	Fū			Aoi	碧	青	葵	亜緒
7	響	Hibiki	Kyō			Asahi	朝陽	旭	あさひ	朝日
8	歩	Ayumu	Ayumi			Rin	凜	倫	凜	りん
9	葵	Aoi				Sena	星那	瀬名	世奈	世菜
10	心	Kokoro	Shin	Jin		Rui	琉生	壘	瑠衣	るい

Table 3: Popular Gender-Neutral Names

they indicate that *shāpusa* ‘sharpness’ is a characteristic of boys’ names, which they imply hiragana lacks yet 3-letter names have; they do not further explain how or why boys’ names are sharp. Both editions also caution parents about names not clearly identified for gender. Example (4) is largely identical in both editions, noting that gender-neutral names are becoming popular, but warning that they may lead to being misgendered.

(1) *Onna no ko no ba'ai wa, hiragana de matomeru to iu no mo, hitotsu no hōhō desu.*

[For girls, writing (the name) in hiragana is also one solution (to problematic names with too many character strokes).] (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, p. 28; Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 28)

(2) *Hiragana/katakana no namae to iu to, onna no ko no mono to iu imēji ga tsuyoi no desu ga, kore kara otoko no ko no namae ni tsukawareru yō ni nattekuru deshō. ... Kore o ippo sakidori shitemite wa dō deshō ka. Tadashi, kono ba'ai wa, tokuchō no shāpusa o ikasu nara 3moji ni todometeota hō ga bunan desu.*

[(People’s) image when they talk about hiragana/katakana name is usually that it’s for girls, but they will likely be used for boys in the future. ... However, to keep their characteristic sharpness, (for boys) it’s safer to stick to 3-letter names.] (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, p. 46; Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 46)

(3) *Koko sūnen no keikō toshite wa, otoko no ko, onna no ko no kubetsu ga [hakkiri] tsuku namae yori [to tomo ni], chūseiteki na namae ga [mo] kono-mareteimasu. Koko dewa, otoko no ko, onna no ko no dochira ni mo ninki no namae o agemashita.*

[As a trend of the last several years, rather than [in addition to] names, which are [clearly] differentiable as being for boys or girls, names that are gender-neutral are [also] well-favored. Here, (we) listed names popular among both boys and girls.] (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, p. 27; Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 27)

(4) *‘Otoko wa otoko rashiku, onna wa onna rashiku’ to iu yori, danjo no kubetsu ga tsukizurai, chūseiteki na namae o konomu hito mo [ima wa] ōi yō desu. Chūseiteki na namae niwa koseiteki na mono ga ōi yō desu ga, yahari [ippō], hito ni namae o tsugeru toki ni seibetsu o machigawareru koto ga ōi mono [mo]. Toku ni chīsai uchi wa, kaodachi ya kamigata dewa handan dekinikuku, kodomo [akachan] ga issho ni iru toki ni namae o tsutaetemo, seibetsu o machigawareyasui to iu koto o atama ni ireteita hōga ii deshō.*

[Rather than ‘men should be manly, women should be womanly,’ [nowadays], it seems there are many people who prefer gender-neutral names, which are difficult to differentiate for gender. It seems there are many unique names within gender-neutral names, but after all [on the other hand], (there are) [also] many cases where (the child’s) gender will simply be mistaken. (You) should probably keep in mind that (their) gender will be mistaken easily, especially when the child [baby] is young and (their gender) is difficult to tell from their face or hair style.] (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, p. 40; Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 40)

Initially, it appears Tamahiyo took a double-reversal in their stance toward gender-neutral names. In their explanation in example (3), Tamahiyo steps back their assertions between the 2003 and 2023–2024 editions: In the 2003 edition, it clearly states that current trends prefer gender-neutral names, whereas in the later edition, it hedges this, stating they are popular *along with* names that can be differentiated. Yet, this hedging is largely removed from example (4)’s caution: Where the 2003 edition hedges its assertion that people prefer (*it seems*) gender-neutral names, the later edition does not. It also replaces the phrase *yahari* [after all] with *ippō* [on the other hand], and the sentence final particle *mono* [simply] with the particle *mo* [also], fragmenting the second sentence. Both *yahari* and *mono*

Gender	Phonological forms only				Graphic forms only				Matched phonological/graphic names			
	2003 edition		2023-2024 edition		2003 edition		2023-2024 edition		2003 edition		2023-2024 edition	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Girls, total [A]	2,222	47.36%	749	51.83%	6,123	53.99%	3,921	53.62%	6,690	53.63%	4,394	53.33%
Only for girls [A – C = D]	1,736	37.00%	621	42.98%	5,803	51.17%	3,641	49.79%	6,504	52.14%	4,115	49.94%
Boys, total [B]	2,956	63.00%	824	57.02%	5,537	48.83%	3,672	50.21%	5,971	47.86%	4,125	50.06%
Only for boys [B – C = E]	2,470	52.64%	696	48.17%	5,271	46.48%	3,392	46.38%	5,785	46.37%	3,846	46.67%
Both [C]	486	10.36%	128	8.86%	266	2.35%	280	3.83%	186	1.49%	279	3.39%
Total unique forms [C + D + E]	4,692	100.00%	1,445	100.00%	11,340	100.00%	7,313	100.00%	12,475	100.00%	8,240	100.00%

Table 4: Number of Names in the Matched Phonological/Graphic Name Lists

indicate the speaker’s subjective stance, leaving the later edition with a more objective quality. Removing the hedging language contributes to this, suggesting that—like the removal of personalized reports—the guide has shifted from a familial voice, to one of authority.

Quantitative Analysis: Semantic Images and Names, 2003 and 2023–2024

In the list to choose names by sound, each name is listed phonologically, followed by potential ways to write it; the same graphic forms may be listed multiple times for different phonological forms. For example, the first phonological form in the girls’ list, *Ai*, is given seven graphic forms (亜維, 亜衣, 藍, 愛唯, 明依, 彩衣, and 歩惟). Of those, 愛唯 is also listed for the phonological forms *Ayu* and *Mei*, and 藍 for the phonological form *Ran*. Each matched phonological/graphic name (e.g., 亜維 read as *Ai*) only appears once unless it is listed for both genders, as is the name 翔愛 *Toa*.

In the 2003 edition, it appeared that Tamahiyo put in effort to equally represent boys’ and girls’ names. Of the overall 12,661 matched phonological/graphic names, 186 (1.49%) were used for both genders, giving 12,475 unique matched forms overall (see Table 4). There were identical number of pages (63) for both, for a total of 6,690 girls’ and 5,971 boys’ names. The difference in the number of names listed, even though the number of actual page numbers was identical, is because many phonological names have more than one way that they can be written, which

is more common for girls' names (Unser-Schutz, 2023). As indicated by the lower number of unique forms, the same phonological and graphic forms of names were seen multiple times with different combinations, with each phonological form seen 2.69 times each. Compared with the 180 matched phonological/graphic names assigned to both genders, there were 486 (10.36%) such phonological forms and 266 (2.35%) graphic forms.

At 8,519 total, the 2023–2024 edition's lists were shorter (53 and 55 pages for boys and girls, respectively) and used larger font, allowing for fewer names per page. Of those, 8,240 were unique matched phonological/graphic names, with somewhat more matched forms for girls' (4,394) than for boys (4,125); 279 (3.39%) were for both genders. While twice as many as in the 2003 edition, matched names for both genders were still infrequent. Aside from the number of names listed, the major difference between editions was that the same phonological forms appeared with more varied graphic forms in the 2023–2024 edition: 5.70 on average. Compared with the 279 matched phonological/graphic names assigned to both genders, there were 128 (8.86%) such phonological forms and 266 (3.83%) graphic forms.

The larger number of phonological forms for both genders indicates that there are more names used for both genders that *sound* the same but *look* different, which accounts for changes in the gender-neutral names list. This is consistent with other data sets and supports suggestions that there are other ways, such as the semantic imagery evoked by kanji, that gender is differentiated in contemporary names (Unser-Schutz, 2023). In this regard, the numbers of names presented for each semantic image category of kanji listed were largely identical in the 2003 edition (see Table 5). Of 55 categories, there were two exceptions: *To exceed* ('*oya o oikoshite rippa na hito ni natte*' [exceed your parents and become a wonderful person]) (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, p. 458) and *strong* both had more boys' names.

This was not the case in the 2023–2024 edition, where only 21 categories had similar numbers (within one or two) listed for both genders. This may reflect changes in the names submitted, but given the balance of the 2003 edition, it is more likely that they did not prioritize providing similar types of semantic images for both genders. At 28 of 55, semantic image categories with more boys' names were more common. Although the categories with the largest differences [*to exceed*, *courage* (44 boys' to 14 girls' names each) and *strong* (24 boys' to no girls' names)] may seem consistent with masculine imagery, many others are less clearly so, such as *elegance* (35 boys' to 23 girls' names), offering no obvious semantic connection between categories. Generally, Tamahiyo appears to see a wider variety of kanji to be appropriate for boys and emphasizes care about semantics with boys (see p. 44 and 59, of each edition, respectively; see Table 2); the changes observed here seem to reflect this.

Semantic image category	2003		2023–2024	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<i>To exceed</i>	36	19	44	14
Fame	28	26	29	29
<i>Sincere</i>	28	27	36	22
Winter	28	28	29	29
Active	27	28	39	19
Courage	27	27	44	14
Intelligent	27	28	31	27
<i>Mountains and rivers</i>	27	28	39	18
<i>Sky and universe</i>	27	30	35	23
Beloved	26	29	29	29
Bright	26	30	30	28
Compassion	26	30	39	19
Creative	26	30	37	21
<i>Dreams and hope</i>	26	30	34	24
Earth	26	29	29	29
Elegance	26	28	35	23
Future	26	30	35	23
Generous	26	29	39	19
<u>Glamorous</u>	26	29	26	32
<u>Happiness</u>	26	29	24	34
Innocent	26	29	31	27
<i>Light and wind</i>	26	29	35	23
Passionate	26	29	39	19
Refreshing	26	30	37	21
Sea and water	26	30	29	29
<u>Spring</u>	26	30	26	32
<u>Summer</u>	26	29	25	33
<i>Autumn</i>	25	30	33	25
Strong	16	8	24	0
Academic excellence	12	12	14	10
Animals	12	12	15	9
<u>Cute</u>	12	12	7	17
Effort	12	12	17	7
Freedom	12	12	12	11
Harmony	12	12	14	10
Heart	12	12	16	8
Honest	12	12	14	10
Independence	12	12	18	6
<u>Japanese</u>	12	12	10	14
Leader	12	12	18	6
Literary	12	12	11	13
Logical	12	12	17	7
Abundance, artistic, auspicious, calendar and zodiac, cleanliness, colors and fragrance, fantasy, history, humor, life, peace, satisfaction, youth*			12 each	
*Categories featuring three or more names for one gender in the 2023–2024 edition were noted with <i>italics</i> (more boys' names) and <u>underlining</u> (more girls' names). Categories with identical numbers of names across all genders and editions were combined for clarity.				

Table 5: Number of Matched Phonological/Graphic Names Listed for Semantic Image Categories (Descending Order for Boys' Names in the 2003 Edition)

The six categories featuring more girls' names were, in descending order: *happiness*, *summer*, *glamorous*, *spring*, *cute*, and *Japanese*. Some clear relationships may be found by looking at semantic overlap between categories. If one assumes seasonal names are related to time of birth, the abundance of *spring* and *summer* girls' names may seem strange; however, the semantic images they evoke is likely the real reason, as Tamahiyo explains *spring* expresses wishes that children grow to have the strength of new life and *summer* that they should grow to be bright and refreshing (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, 441–442; Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 425–426). Both overlapped with other semantic image categories equal between genders, specifically *spring* with *youth* (芽 [bud], 春 [spring], 萌 [sprout], 若 [youth]) and *summer* with *bright* (陽 [sun], 夏 [summer]). With the exception of *happiness*, all the categories included several kanji related to plants and flowers, such as 桜 [cherry] (*spring*, *Japanese*): seven for *spring*, three for *summer*, and two each for *glamorous*, *spring*, *cute*, and *Japanese*. This would be higher if other words related to plant growth (see 萌 [sprout] above) were included. This may reflect the guide's position that plant words are more frequent for girls (see Table 2). Synthesizing these categories, characteristics like being happy (*happiness*), youthful (*spring*), bright (*summer*), and attractive and pretty (*glamorous*, *cute*, *Japanese*) are believed to be desirable qualities for girls' names—and certainly not *strong*, given this was the single category with no girls' names.

Some imbalances may be related to factors outside of the semantic images. The 2023–2024 edition listed more names related to animals for boys, but three listed used the kanji for 'horse' to write the final masculine ending *ma*. *Ma* can be a suffix for boys' names and is in the list of suffixes in both editions. The abundance of animal-related names may be, thus, swayed by these phonological factors. Likewise, there may be phonological constraints when trying to use certain kanji to make 'gender-appropriate' sounding names within the limits of the readings available for them. For example, although the numbers were identical for *courage* in the 2003 edition, many of the girls' names repeated similar phonological forms (two different graphic forms for *Shiori*, two for *Shiki*, three for *Shiho*, three for *Yūki*), with only slight variations in the kanji used to write them. These repeats were largely removed from the 2023–2024 editions (one each for *Shiori* and *Shiho*).

However, there are clearly also choices to *not* include certain semantic images. Three of the 2003 *courage* names for girls included the kanji 勇, as in 勇氣 *yūki* [courage]; this was only used in one girls' name in the 2023–2024 edition. Likewise, the 2023–2024 edition listed no girls' names for the category *strong*, whereas in 2003, there were eight listed. Three of those used 勇, which, with the decrease in such names for girls' names, in particular, and girls' names, in general, for the category *courage*, suggests Tamahiyo actively decided to remove them.

Discussion

Although explicit discussions of gender were rare, the results make it clear that the guides were structured around gender. In this sense, gender was largely treated as an *a priori* category, with some assumed characteristics revealed throughout the text, such as hiragana being for girls' names. Yet both editions touched upon gender-neutral names, and many names, especially when looking at phonological forms, are, if not *explicitly* so, listed as being potentially for both genders, at least in so far as they appear in the lists for both boys and girls. Consequently, the guides can be seen as an authoritative resource, which strengthens existing beliefs about gender and names, while also expanding on those by drawing popular attention to changes, such as increases in gender-neutral names.

Theoretically, with Tamahiyo's circular influence over time, what was first noted to be a contemporary trend (preferences for gender-neutral names) should become part of the normative description of gender in names in the guides. On the contrary, however, there were very *few* changes to the advice itself. Where there were changes, the 2023–2024 edition was more cautious in its comments on the popularity of gender-neutral names, and less balanced in terms of its efforts to provide equal numbers of boys' and girls' names for semantic image categories. Given that the trend for gender-neutral names has likely increased over the last 20 years (see Barešová, 2020), this seems like a reversal. Indeed, while no semantic images categories were labeled as gendered, the distinct differences in the distribution of names for each semantic image category in the 2023–2024 edition reinforce distinctly gendered patterns.

Although Tamahiyo has been seen as highly influential due to its focus on innovative and unique names, these results instead confirm that conservative trends towards gendered naming remain strong, at least within the childrearing discourse that guides form part of. As a guide that is primarily based on data from readers, this begs the question of how much of what is seen here is cherry-picked by Tamahiyo to reflect their ideology, and how much of it is simply due to changes in their ever-growing database. Although it is likely a mix of these factors, close observations suggest a stronger role for the former. For example, of the six names listed under the categories *courageous* and *strong* for girls including the kanji 勇 in the 2003 edition (勇麻 *Yūma* in both categories, and 勇気 *Yūki*, 勇貴 *Yūki*, 勇美 *Yūki* one time each), only two of these were in the list of 6,690 matched girls' names. Given that the 2003 edition was largely even for all categories, and that they did not necessarily use the same names as in the matched names list, this suggests that they made an active effort to introduce additional names for all categories and genders evenly—and that they no longer sought to do this in the 2023–2024 edition. Likewise, although Tamahiyo calls attention to the popularity

of gender-neutral names, as with the more cautious descriptions and the lower level of overlap in the semantic images listed, it seems less willing to highlight them.

Why would Tamahiyo stop making these efforts for balanced representation between genders? Why would they be more cautious about how they present gender-neutral names? There are three potential and related reasons. First, Tamahiyo may be responding to greater consumer demand. Several years after the original guide was released, Tamahiyo released its first separate guides for boys and girls; in the blurb for the 2009 edition, they state that it was released in response to readers' requests (Tamahiyo, 2023b). With parents increasingly knowing their baby's biological sex prior to birth, once that knowledge is obtained, limiting choices to names that 'match' may seem a natural, if problematic, way of creating an identity for one's child (see Pilcher, 2017 for a more in-depth analysis of these issues). As a for-profit entity, selling what consumers want – and creating desires for new products – is an utmost concern. Creating specialized guides, and emphasizing needs for them, is one way to do so.

Second, the conservative turn observed here may reflect backlash to the unique trends identified with Tamahiyo. In the blurb explaining how it collected data, the 2003 edition notes that the readings used in names were *jiyū* [free]; the 2023-2024 edition removes this, making them appear less encouraging of creativity (Tamiya and Tamago Club, 2003, p. 22; Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 17). Although gender-neutral names may be increasing, 'truly' gender-neutral names, following Lieberman et al. (2000) standard of no more than two-thirds being given to either gender, do not appear to be common. Given the association of *kirakira nēmu* with names supposedly mismatched for gender, and the generally negative public opinion toward *kirakira nēmu* (Unser-Schutz, 2016), one can see that taking a less welcoming stance toward gender-neutral names, and emphasizing gendered differences, might be one way of walking away from controversial trends.

Third, it may be that Tamahiyo plays a different role in child-rearing discourse today. Over the 30 years since *Tamago Club's* inception, Tamahiyo has shifted from being an upstart resource to an authoritative one, as observed in its tone shift and decrease in reader reports. Although Tamahiyo emphasized reader participation, its original readers are now becoming grandparents: See the focus on Tamahiyo's (2023a) 30th anniversary website on such early readers, who they are now calling back to Tamahiyo with a special issue for new grandparents. Tamahiyo may be more reluctant to include trends or advice viewed as controversial, as it could bring its role into question. Becoming more of an authoritative voice may, perversely, have led to Tamahiyo sharing more stereotypically gendered views on names, as it limited the need and the freedom to think outside of the box. That is, they are correcting back to the norms, now that they are a part of these norms themselves.

Knowing that Tamahiyo was more balanced before it became deeply entrenched as an authoritative part of child-rearing discourse, nontraditional media sources like naming websites, especially those not tied into larger brand models, may be more open to showcasing gender-neutral names. Indeed, the top results for a Google search of ‘*chūseiteki na namae*’ [gender-neutral names] on November 10, 2023, boasted long lists of such names (e.g., Kudo, 2023). They may lack the authority and trust that readers may feel for Tamahiyo, but with most naming websites free, they present a low bar for use, and, with those including write-in components, participation. However, it is unlikely that such resources and Tamahiyo are used identically. Where websites may encourage casual use, the Tamahiyo guides live up to their names as *jiten* [dictionary], insofar as they are literal tomes that people buy.

Of course, advice, which is a large part of what the guides are, is not meant to be objective: Advice suggests, without obliging, receivers in a certain course of action, which the giver perceives as being better. That the advice in the Tamahiyo guides should reflect their ideology is inevitable. However, by moving toward an authoritative voice, the subjectiveness of its advice has become hidden. Readers expecting Tamahiyo to be innovative or open may find themselves disappointed. However, precisely because readers make a time and financial commitment when using the guides, one can hypothesize that they are more exposed to, and likely to be influenced by, any gender stereotypes it purports.

Conclusions

With the multifaceted role that Tamahiyo plays as receiver, organizer, and producer of information about contemporary naming practices, it is unsurprising that its role in the dissemination of ideas about controversial trends is complex. This still leaves unanswered questions, most importantly being, how unique the characteristics uncovered are. Although I focused on Tamahiyo due to its unique role discussed above, comparing the results with other contemporaneous and historical guides may offer further insight, as would an analysis of Tamahiyo’s guides for boys and girls, which appear to offer distinct categories from the main guides. Comparing how many of the names listed contained kanji from each category may reveal how evenly they are spread. Similarly, comparing the names obtained from the guides with other data sets, such as the municipal newsletter data used in Unser-Schutz (2023), would be crucial to ascertaining Tamahiyo’s influence on naming practices.

Finally, it should be noted that many names in Tamahiyo’s guides use nonstandard kanji readings, about which it actively cautions readers (Tamago Club and Kurihara, 2022, p. 46). Upon submission of their birth registration, all Japanese

citizens have their names added to their family's family register, the primary legal document identifying citizens; up until present, few restrictions existed on children's names beyond limitations to their graphic form's kanji. However, recent changes to the Family Register Act mean parents will need to choose kanji readings generally recognized and may need to show supporting documents (Unser-Schutz, 2024). Parents might become hesitant to use Tamahiyo if they cannot act as reliable supporting documents, and it may be in Tamahiyo's interest to reposition itself as a purveyor of 'generally recognized' readings, which may correlate to a conservative shift aligned with its authoritative turn. Since girls' names appear to use unusual readings somewhat more frequently (Unser-Schutz, 2023), it may also impact how gendered names are discussed or the girls' names chosen for the lists, making it prime for future research.

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Gendered and Gender-Neutral Naming Practices in Mandarin Chinese: Metaphoric and Non-Metaphoric Imagery Over Time in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates gender-specific names, as well as gender-neutral names in Mandarin Chinese, and explores their naming strategies from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Synchronically, we examined the 100 most frequently used names for girls, boys, and gender-neutral names, using data from the full population of Taiwan (Ministry of the Interior of Taiwan, 2018). We analyzed the frequency of each character in accordance with metaphoric and nonmetaphoric qualities. Diachronically, we reviewed the most frequently used gender-specific names from the recent 100 years over each 10-year period and then analyzed how they change over time. Both diachronically and synchronically, a higher diversity in boy's names is observed. Such diversity aligns with traditional perspectives that assign greater social and public expectations to men. Over time, there appears to be a decrease in gender stereotypes, as reflected in naming practices. The most commonly used gender-neutral names often feature characters with less gendered connotations, which may involve the incorporation of functional words or metaphoric usage not conventionally associated with either gender.

KEYWORDS: gender-specific names, gender-neutral names, mandarin Chinese, naming practices in Taiwan, metaphoric names

Introduction

Names are an important form of self-expression, as naming practices are significant communicative acts. They convey meanings related to identity, social context, and cultural influences (Watson, 1986; Gao, 2011), establishing a connection between the individual and family relationships (Finch, 2008). Over time and across different cultures, names undergo changes, mirroring the prevailing values and ideals of their respective eras (Zhongti & Millward, 1989; Lieberman et al., 2000; Du et al., 2020). For example, personal naming offers insight into the construction of gender in society. Acknowledging that masculinity and femininity are cultural constructions (Connell, 2005) and that gendered naming aids individuals in internalizing and personalizing these cultural constructions (Gao, 2011), the study of names provides valuable insights into the ways gender and personhood are constructed in society.

In this study, we are interested in the following questions. First, what characters are currently employed for gender-specific names in Taiwan, and how do they reflect societal attitudes toward different genders? Second, what are the most frequently used characters for girls and boys over time, and how have these naming patterns evolved? Finally, how are gender-neutral names being adopted in contemporary society?

Gender Equality in Taiwan

Taiwan's gender concepts are deeply influenced by traditional Confucian thoughts, which conceptualized women as managers of household and educators of children in the home, and placed them in a disadvantaged position (Chang, 2010). The influence of Confucianism on women's societal roles is exemplified by the concept of 三從 "Three Obediences" (Ching, 1998, p. 94), which means "subjecting women to their fathers, then to husbands, and then to sons during widowhood." Doubtless, Confucius supported the patriarchal character of society, in general.

In Chinese culture, traditional gender roles often portray men and women as embodying the principles of *Yin* and *Yang* (Wang, 2013). In its original meaning, *Yin* represents darkness while *Yang* represents sun or light. These symbols reflect the dualistic nature of the universe, where opposing forces are interconnected and interdependent. Within this framework, men, associated with *Yang*, are attributed with qualities such as activity, strength, and involvement in the external world, implying the public sphere. Conversely, women, associated with *Yin*, are perceived to possess qualities, such as passivity, receptivity, and engagement in the internal world, representing the domestic sphere.

Since the 1960s, Taiwan's industrialization and advancements in women's education have led to a notable rise in women's employment rates (Yu, 2023). Yet,

research spanning the 1970s to the 1980s reveals that traditional gender norms evolved slowly. The entrenched expectation of 男主外女主內 “men working outside and women working inside (managing the household)” continues to dominate both the societal and familial division of labor (Lu, 1981; Gallin, 1984). After 1980, the political structure gradually transitioned from an authoritarian system to one of democratic openness. Following the lifting of martial law in 1987, as society increasingly opened up due to democratic movements, favorable conditions for the women’s movement also emerged (Chang, 2010, p. 12–13).

Research centering on the 1990s and 2000s suggests that although there was a general increase in public support for women’s employment and gender equality in public spaces, a relative endorsement of gender segregation persisted within families (Lu, 2011). In 2017, Taiwan became the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage and achieved the highest proportion of female legislators in Asia (41.6% of women since 2020, Taiwan Executive Yuan, 2022). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Centre’s Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) published in 2023, Taiwan ranks the highest in Asia for gender equality (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023; Taiwan Executive Yuan, 2024).

Building on previous research, despite the gradual evolution in public perceptions regarding women’s roles in public spheres and the labor market, it is essential to recognize the persistence of traditional gender norms within both familial and societal contexts. For example, a study conducted by Weng et al. (2020), analyzing survey data on Taiwan’s social changes from 2002 to 2012, revealed that women devote approximately 3 times more hours to housework compared to men. Furthermore, the significance placed on women’s physical appearance has historically been influential and remains a central aspect of feminine identities in Taiwanese society (Keyser-Verreault, 2023).

Naming Practice and Gender-specific Names

In Mandarin Chinese, there are no rigid regulations in either Taiwan or China governing the naming of children, affording parents the freedom to select names that resonate with them. These chosen names frequently mirror the beliefs, expectations, and affection parents have for their children, concurrently embodying societal expectations and stereotypes associated with the two genders (Shih, 1984; Bin & Millward, 1987; Farris, 1988; Fan, 1996).

A name in Mandarin Chinese generally comprises both a last name and a given name. Taking the former Taiwanese president *Tsai Ing-wen* as an example, 蔡 *Tsai*¹ serves as the family name, while the given name consists of two characters, 英文 *Ing-wen*. In Taiwan, the prevailing pattern for given names involves two

characters (as indicated by 98.33% of names, based on the Ministry of Interior's 2018 statistics), while the family name commonly consists of a single character (99.87% one character, 0.12% two characters). In a two-character given name, the initial character traditionally signifies a generational name, which can be common to all members of the same gender within a family generation (Watson, 1986, p. 621). For example, among a group of sisters, individuals might share a personal name with the character 美 *mei*, signifying “beautiful.” This can result in names like 美華 *Mei-hua* “beautiful flower,” 美珠 *Mei-zhu* “beautiful pearl,” 美雲 *Mei-yun* “beautiful cloud,” and 美霞 *Mei-xia* “beautiful evening glow.”

Nevertheless, in different Chinese-speaking communities, naming practices may also vary due to social, cultural, historical, political, and linguistic factors (Shih, 1984; Watson, 1986; Zhongti & Millward, 1989; Finch, 2008; Obukhova et al., 2014). For instance, in China, the one-child policy was implemented in 1971. Since there is no or less need to use the generation name to mark relations between siblings in the same generation, there was an increase in single-character given names in China, that is, from the 1960s to the 1990s, single-character names had been rising from 7.6% to 27.6% (Ministry of Public Security of China, 2020). On the other hand, this increase in using one-character given names is not followed in Taiwan.

Research on gender-specific Chinese names suggests that distinguishing between boys' and girls' names can mainly be approached from two perspectives: semantics and phonetics. The pictographic nature of Chinese characters introduces a complexity in the analysis. Although certain characters offer visual hints to their pronunciation, a substantial number of Chinese characters incorporate both a semantic component (conveying meaning) and a phonetic component (indicating pronunciation). In terms of semantic components, numerous studies demonstrate that certain characters or radicals, basic components used to form characters, typically representing specific semantic categories, are linked to specific genders in given names (Xie, 2000; Du et al., 2020). As an example for radicals, Sung (1981, p. 80, cited in Watson, 1986) observes that in certain Taiwanese families, all sons' names might be chosen from characters containing the radical 人/亻 (*ren*), denoting “human.” As an illustration, the sons in a particular family could be named with 偉 *wei* “great,” 俊 *jun* “handsome,” or 保 *bao* “protect.” Notably, the radical 亻 *ren* is a common element present in all of these characters.

At the character level, girl's names are often associated with characters denoting beautiful, quiet, or soft images, while boy's names are conventionally linked to characters expressing prosperous, heroic, or strong images (Shih, 1984; Gao, 2011; Du et al., 2020). Moreover, metaphor is also a crucial strategy when it comes to naming. For example, women are often compared to beings or things that are con-

sidered as feminine, such as water, flower, and jade, whereas men are traditionally compared to those perceived as masculine, such as trees, metal, and big animals (Li, 2022). These elements are often selected to name girls and boys, respectively.

In terms of the phonological and the phonetic level, van de Weijer et al. (2020) explored sound symbolism in gender-specific names and discovered that the vowel /i/, a front vowel associated with smallness, is more prevalent in women's names. Conversely, the vowel /ɤ/, a close-mid back unrounded vowel, tends to be used in men's names. Jia and Zhao's (2019) research, employing NLP (natural language processing) tools, demonstrates that phonology also contributed to character recognition for gender-specific names. For instance, 青 *qing*, signifying "seafoam," serves as a phonetic component in characters with a similar pronunciation, commonly employed in feminine names, such as 靜 *jing*, meaning "quiet," and 靚 *jing*, denoting "beautiful." Additionally, 琴 *qin*², a Chinese musical instrument traditionally associated with feminine talent, is notably utilized in girl's names. In this context, the phonetic components *qing* and *qin* encompass distinct feminine cues.

However, although in most cases, we can distinguish the gender of the person being referred to by semantic or phonetic cues, determining the gender of some names can be challenging. For instance, consider two names that belong to either a woman or a man (van de Weijer et al., 2020, p. 1):

- (1) 王雷 Wang Lei, female mountaineer, male basketball player
- (2) 王皓 Wang Hao, female diver, male chess player

To our knowledge, current research on Chinese given names has primarily concentrated on gender-specific names, with less attention given to examining the naming characteristics of gender-neutral names. In this article, we will explore gender-specific names from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives and delve into the most commonly used names shared by both men and women in Taiwan, which serve as gender-neutral names. As an initial analysis, we focus on the semantic components of names in the current article, since their extraction is more straightforward and does not require additional interpretation.

The article is structured as follows: The methodology section outlines the data collection process and our analysis methodology. The section "Gender-Specific Names: Synchronic Analysis" delves into the synchronic analysis of gender-specific names, while the "Gender-Neutral Names: Synchronic Analysis" section focuses on the synchronic analysis of gender-neutral names. In the section called "Gender-Specific Names: Diachronic Analysis", we examine gender-specific names from a diachronic perspective. Finally, we provide discussion and conclusion.

Methodology

Here, we provide a comprehensive overview of the data collection and analysis procedures employed.

Data Collection

Our data are derived from an analysis of Taiwan's national civil registration data, which includes 23,574,274 individuals, sourced from the 2018 publication by the Ministry of the Interior in Taiwan. Since the year 2010, this biannual report has been regularly released. It delves into a variety of topics, including regulations pertaining to names, the naming practices of various ethnic groups and foreigners, as well as analyses of the frequency rankings of both surnames and given names.

We examine the most frequently used names for both women and men from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. In the synchronic analysis, from the whole data set, we utilized data containing the 100 most common women's ($n = 1,204,531$) and men's ($n = 628,443$) given names. Regarding gender-neutral names, we selected the 100 most common names (family name and given name) that are shared by both genders ($n = 35,025$). The data, published by the Ministry of the Interior, were obtained by initially comparing names among individuals and then categorizing them based on gender. The final criteria were determined on the basis of the proportion of men and women with the same given name and family name, falling within the 40%–60% range. For instance, the name shared by most individuals of both genders is 陳宥均 *Chen You-jun*, with 691 occurrences. In this name, *Chen* is the family name and *You-jun* is a two-character given name. Of these occurrences, 375 (54.27%) are men and 316 (45.73%) are women. As the goal of this study is to analyze given names, we only consider the given name; in this case, 宥均 *You-jun*.

In the diachronic analysis, we extracted data containing the 10 most common girls' first names ($n = 389,167$) and boys' first names ($n = 207,932$) for each decade, spanning birth years from 1912 to 2018, resulting in 11 groups (Figure 1). It is worth noting that these data are derived from currently living individuals, so there are fewer names recorded for earlier decades compared to more recent ones.

Initial observations indicate a higher token count for women compared to men. This suggests that women are more likely to share identical names, signifying a lower diversity in given names.³

This result can be interpreted in light of the historical context, in which women traditionally held a lower status in traditional Chinese society. Consequently, parents might have invested less consideration when naming daughters compared to sons. Furthermore, women were rarely addressed by their personal names and were more commonly referred to based on their familial relationships

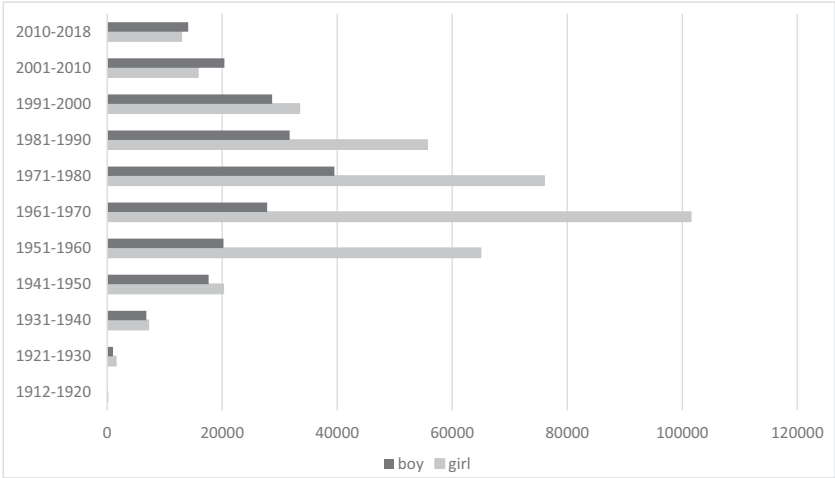


Figure 1: Token counts of girls’ and boys’ names over time.

(Watson, 1986). Following the Confucian principles of “Three Obediences” (Ching, 1998), a woman, for example, born to a father named Li, who marries a man named Wang and gives birth to children, would initially be acknowledged as “daughter of Li” before marriage. After marriage, she would typically be recognized as the “wife of Wang” or “mother of Wang.”

However, we can also observe that since the 1990s, the ratio of girls’ and boys’ names has been getting closer. By the 2000s, the number of names for boys surpasses that of names for girls. This indicates that girls’ names no longer have as many repetitions as before, reflecting the increasing popularity of gender equality concepts. Consequently, parents now place equal importance on naming both boys and girls, aiming to highlight each child’s uniqueness.

Analysis

In our analysis, a single token number contains a given name composed of two characters. We treat each character as a unit and analyze its frequency in both metaphoric usage (e.g., plants, animals, and objects) and nonmetaphoric usage (such as qualities *virtuous* and *strong*). Additionally, we consider each character’s radical to evaluate its potential association with the selection of gender-specific or gender-neutral names. For instance, characters sharing the radical 女 *nü*, meaning “woman,” have a semantic link, typically related to feminine references (mother, sister, grandmother, etc.) or concepts considered to be associated with femininities, like beauty or jealousy. For instance, one of the most common girl’s names is 秀蘭 *Xiu-lan*, which comprised 秀 *xiu*, meaning “pretty” and 蘭 *lan* meaning

“orchid.” Initially, we classify the character *xiu* as nonmetaphoric and *lan* as having a metaphoric usage related to plants. We then proceed to analyze their radicals individually, where *xiu*’s radical 禾 *he* signifies “cereal,” and *lan*’s radical “艹” represents “grass.” Subsequently, we further classified these subcategories based on their semantic relationships with such concepts as beauty and plants.

To quantitatively assess the variance of subcategories in boys’ and girls’ names that we observed, we use the type/token ratio, a metric used to scrutinize the diversity within a set of data. This ratio is calculated by dividing the number of unit types by the number of unit tokens in the data. For example, we can imagine sample data with the following tokens of subcategories: {beauty, beauty, beauty, beauty, appearance}. This vector has two token types, that is, {beauty} and {appearance}. This vector has five tokens in total. Therefore, the type/token ratio is equal to $\frac{2}{5} = 0.4$. In such a way, we can calculate the diversity of subcategories for characters, radicals, metaphors, and nonmetaphors in our data. Because of the large number of subcategories and tokens in the data, we also apply the logarithm function of the type/token ratio, to make the numbers easier to read.

Finally, we assess the statistical significance of the subcategories when it comes to predicting the feminine ratio of characters. To do so, we calculate the ratio of girls’ names for each character in the dataset. For example, if a character is used 10 times in names for boys and 90 times in names for girls, its feminine ratio is $90/100 = 0.9$. The ratio ranges between 0 and 1, 0 meaning that a character is only used in boys’ names, while a ratio of 1 means that a character is used in girls’ names. Then, we use a simple linear regression model to predict the feminine ratio of characters using the subcategories (such as “beauty,” “appearance,” among others) and the metaphor annotations. We did not consider mixed-effect models since there are no variables to use as random effects in the dataset.

Gender-Specific Names: Synchronic Analysis

This section introduces girls’ and boys’ names categorized in relation to non-metaphoric and metaphoric usage.

Girl’s Names

Figure 2 shows the distribution of semantic subcategories of characters used in girls’ names. The number on the graph indicates the token count of the characters used, while the *x*-axis represents the percentage. As all the given names investigated are two characters, the total number ($n = 2,409,062$) is doubled to the number of the collected given names.

In total, characters engaged in nonmetaphoric usage account for 76.9%, whereas those involved in metaphoric usage make up 23.1%.

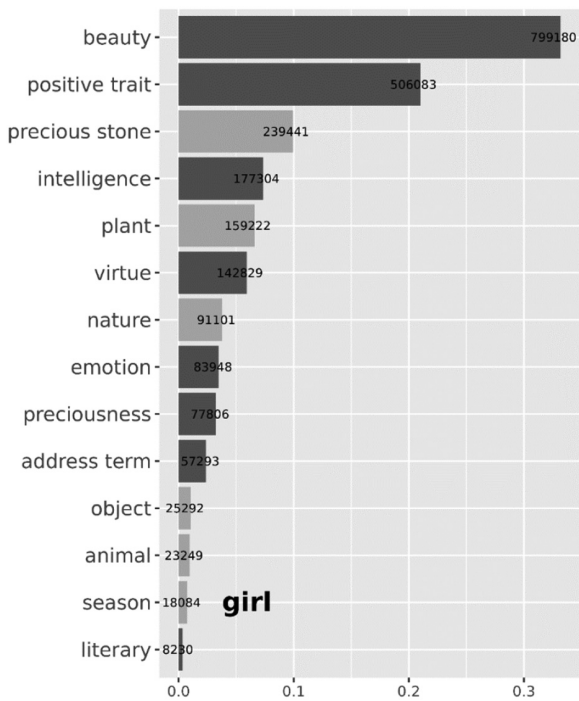


Figure 2: The distribution of semantic subcategories of girls' names.

(dark gray = nonmetaphoric; light gray = metaphoric).

Girls' Names Categorized by Nonmetaphoric Usage

The most prominent subcategories employed in names given to girls include beauty, positive traits, intelligence, virtues, and emotions. Table 1 provides some examples with corresponding characters.

Characters representing beauty make up 33% of girl's names, indicating the enduring importance of women's physical beauty as a significant aspect of feminine

Subcategory	Examples
Beauty	beautiful (美 <i>mei</i>); elegant, good-looking (秀 <i>xiu</i>)
Positive trait	good (淑 <i>shu</i>); graceful (雅 <i>ya</i>)
Intelligence	smart, nimble (玲 <i>ling</i>); smart, agile (慧 <i>hui</i>)
Virtue	chastity (贞 <i>zhen</i>); quiet (静 <i>jing</i>)
Emotion	happiness, pleasure (怡 <i>yi</i>); glad (欣 <i>xin</i>)
Preciousness	treasure (珍 <i>zhen</i> , 宝 <i>bao</i>)

Table 1: Examples of Nonmetaphoric Usage in Girls' Names

Subcategory	Examples
Precious stone	jade (玉 <i>yu</i>) jade; beautiful green stone (碧 <i>bì</i>)
Plant	orchid (蘭 <i>lan</i>); plum (梅 <i>mei</i>); hibiscus (蓉 <i>rong</i>)
Nature	cloud (雲 <i>yun</i>); snow (雪 <i>xue</i>)
Object	suffix to denote many instruments (琴 <i>qin</i>)
Animal	phoenix (鳳 <i>feng</i>)
Season	autumn (秋 <i>qiu</i>); spring (春 <i>chun</i>)

Table 2: Examples of Metaphoric Usage in Girl’s Names

identities within Taiwanese society (Keyser-Verreault, 2023). Consequently, it is customary to use words that evoke ideas of beauty, elegance, and grace when naming girls.

Positive traits account for 21% of characters. Although the literal meanings of these characters suggesting positive traits may seem neutral, their connotations are inherently feminine. For instance, the character 淑 *shu* forms the basis for various terms associated with women, like 淑女 *shu nü* “lady/fair maiden,” and 賢淑 *xian shu*, exclusively used to describe a virtuous woman. It carries connotations of qualities such as diligent, thrifty, considerate, and gentle.

Furthermore, characters representing women’s virtues, including qualities like chastity and serenity, are frequently integrated into their names. Finally, positive emotions like happiness and pleasure, along with characters associated with intelligence and preciousness, are commonly integrated into girl’s names.

Girl’s Names Categorized by Metaphors

In Chinese culture, women have historically been symbolically associated with elements traditionally considered feminine, such as plants, jade, and water (van de Weijer et al., 2020; Li, 2022). The incorporation of metaphors in naming practices underscores that names extend beyond mere labels, serving as carriers of cultural, social, and personal significance. These elements, symbolically used to describe human qualities, are also purposefully integrated into the crafting of personal names. Among the most commonly used elements in girl’s names (see Table 2) are precious stones (10%), especially jade. Jade is always a symbol of purity, goodness, elegance, and kindness in Chinese culture; this mineral and other similar stones are also used to represent women.

Plants comprise 6.6% of the usage, particularly flowers, such as orchid, plum, and hibiscus. The symbolism of flowers, in general, encompasses notions of beauty, as well as the fleeting nature of life, often symbolizing a woman’s youth. Each

type of flower, however, carries unique connotations. For instance, orchids are associated with beauty, nobility, and virtue, while plums represent chastity and purity in Chinese culture.

Among natural elements (3.8%), the connection between water and femininity has deep roots in Chinese beliefs and symbolism. It mirrors the cultural perception of qualities traditionally associated with women, which encompass attributes like flexibility, adaptability, nurturing, and gentleness. Water, along with other related natural elements such as clouds, rain, and ice, is often reflected in women's names, with examples like cloud and snow.

The three categories, object, animal, and season, each account for about 1% of metaphoric usage. Objects frequently used by women are commonly employed as metonyms to represent the women who use them. For example, 琴 *qin*, a suffix to denote many instruments traditionally associated with feminine talent, is often integrated into girl's names. The phoenix, when considered alongside the dragon, embodies feminine qualities and is often associated with the empress, symbolizing traits like peace, beauty, and dignity. Finally, two seasons, autumn and spring, are symbolically linked to women's agreeableness.

Boys' Names

Figure 3 presents the distribution of semantic subcategories of characters used in boy's names. It is noticeable that there are more categories than those for girl's names, especially nonmetaphoric usage, leading to a more dispersed proportion within each category.

Overall, characters primarily involved in nonmetaphoric usage constitute 94.8%, while those engaged in metaphoric usage represent 5.2%, in contrast to 23.1% for girl's names.

Boy's Names Categorized by Nonmetaphoric Usage

The most significant nonmetaphoric usage categories include personal achievement (23.2%), esteeming erudition (14.1%), virtues (11.1%), and family ethics (7.7%). Many categories are not found in girl's names, such as personal achievement, esteeming erudition, military, politics, strength, religion, and wealth value. This underscores that men often bear higher societal expectations within their defined social roles, which encompass responsibilities such as defending the nation, providing for the family's financial needs, and upholding virtues in line with Confucian principles, including loyalty, moral integrity, and virtuousness, among others (see Table 3).

Additionally, we note that among these characters, those used in boy's names tend to imply more action-oriented verbs, such as 建 *jian* "establish," 榮 *rong*

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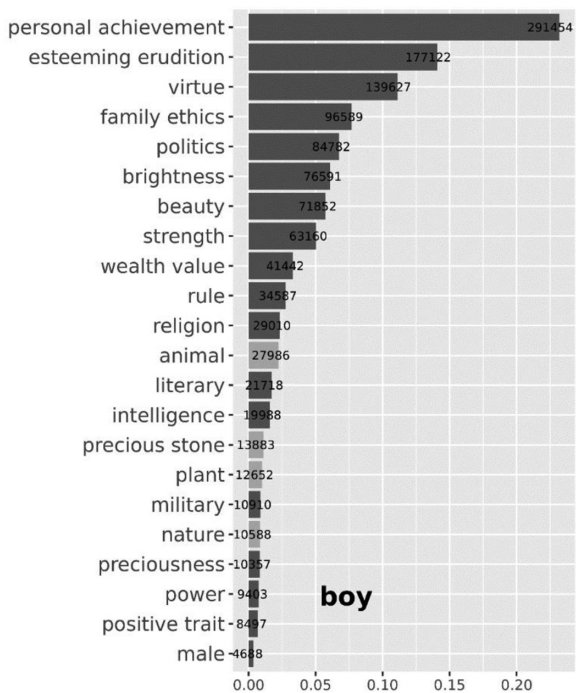


Figure 3: The distribution of semantic subcategories of boy’s names.
(dark gray = nonmetaphoric; light gray = metaphoric).

“flourish,” and 發 *fa* “become rich.” In contrast, those employed in girl’s names often describe more stationary qualities, such as “beautiful,” “quiet,” and “content.” This conforms to traditional gendered stereotypes that often associated men with

Subcategory	Examples
Personal achievement	ambition (志 <i>zhì</i>); establish (建 <i>jiàn</i>); outstanding, heroic (豪 <i>háo</i>)
Esteeming erudition	broadly knowledgeable (博 <i>bó</i>); broad, far-reaching (宏 <i>hóng</i>)
Virtue	able, virtuous (賢 <i>xián</i>); loyal (忠 <i>zhōng</i>); justice, righteousness (義 <i>yì</i>); virtue (德 <i>dé</i>)
Family ethic	home, house (家 <i>jiā</i>); roof, house (宇 <i>yǔ</i>)
Positive trait	bright, clear (明 <i>míng</i>); splendor (輝 <i>huī</i>)
Politics	country, nation (國 <i>guó</i>); politics (政 <i>zhèng</i>)
Beauty	handsome (俊 <i>jùn</i>)
Strength	male, a person of power and stature (雄 <i>xióng</i>); strong (強 <i>qiáng</i>)
Wealth value	flourish (榮 <i>róng</i>); money, wealth (財 <i>cái</i>)

Table 3: Examples of Nonmetaphoric Usage in Boy’s Names

Subcategory	Examples
Animal	dragon (龍 <i>long</i>); (bird) to fly (翔 <i>xiang</i>)
Precious stone	gold (金 <i>jin</i>)
Plant	cypress (柏 <i>bo</i>)
Nature	continued rain (霖 <i>lin</i>)

Table 4: Examples of Metaphoric Usage in Boy’s Names

the notion *Yang*, which are linked to qualities like activity, strength, and the public sphere. Conversely, women, often associated with the notion of *Yin*, are linked to qualities such as passivity, receptivity, and the domestic sphere.

Boy’s Names Categorized by Metaphors

Metaphoric usage is less common in boy’s names when compared to girl’s names (Table 4); only five characters are employed (n = 65,109), which stands in stark contrast to the 24 characters found in girl’s names (n = 556,389). This finding corresponds to research indicating that there are more metaphors used to describe women than to describe men in the Chinese language (Li, 2022).

In contrast to the phoenix, parents often aspire for their sons to be linked with dragons. This aspiration is encapsulated perfectly in a Chinese idiom, 望子成龍, 望女成鳳 *wang zi cheng long*, and *wang nü cheng feng*, which translates to “wish one’s son to be a dragon, wish one’s daughter to be a phoenix.” This idiom reflects the hope that a son will achieve great success, akin to the powerful, strong, and excellent attributes associated with a dragon. Similarly, it conveys the aspiration that a daughter will grow up to exhibit the grace, beauty, and nobility symbolized by the phoenix in Chinese culture. Other elements commonly utilized in boy’s names include references to gold, trees, and perpetual rainfall.

Gender-Neutral Names: Synchronic Analysis

Figure 4 illustrates the overall distribution of characters used in gender-neutral names. A gender-neutral name in Chinese would typically minimize gender-related characteristics. Strategies for achieving this neutrality include avoiding words with obvious personality traits associated with either gender, refraining from characters that carry the radical 女 *nü* “woman,” and opting for words that are novel and not conventionally linked to specific gender attributes.

When considering percentages alone, we note that the ratio of nonmetaphoric and metaphoric usage lies between that of girl’s names and boy’s names, with 83.7% for nonmetaphoric usage and 16.3% for metaphoric usage.

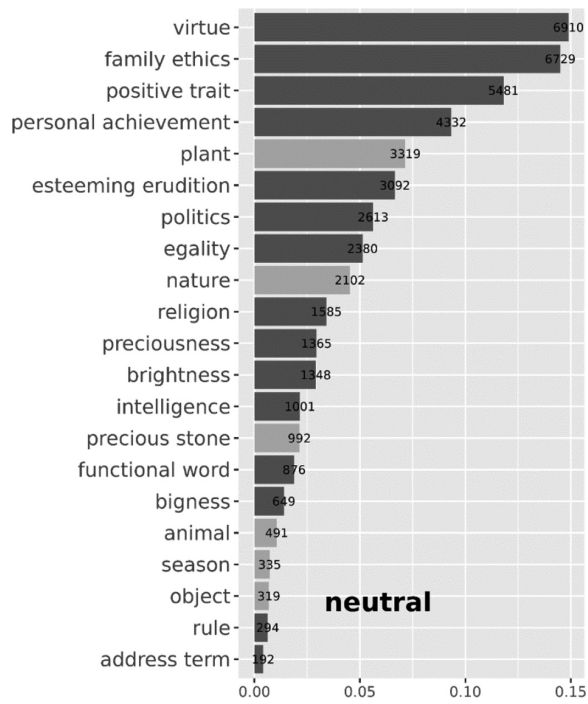


Figure 4: The distribution of semantic subcategories of gender-neutral names. (dark gray = nonmetaphoric; light gray = metaphoric).

Gender-Neutral Names Categorized by Nonmetaphor

The character most commonly shared by both genders is 均 *jun*, which means “equal” or “even” (n = 2,380, with 1,198 tokens for boys and 1,182 for girls). Although we cannot ascertain whether parents intentionally sought a name associated with gender equality when choosing their children’s names, it is a remarkable coincidence that the word’s meaning, “equal,” agrees with its prevalent usage in gender-neutral names (Table 5).

Among the gender-neutral names, characters with strong gendered connotations are not encountered. For example, none of the characters mentioned above for women’s names are included. Appearance is not emphasized, and there is no character with the radical *woman*.

Though both girl’s and boy’s names may overlap in certain subcategories, such as virtue, distinctions exist between the virtues traditionally associated with each gender. For instance, traits like chastity and quietness are traditionally linked to

Subcategory	Examples
Virtue	forgive, pardon (有 <i>you</i>); moral relationship (倫 <i>lun</i>); quality (品 <i>pin</i>)
Family ethics	home, house (家 <i>jia</i>); the oldest among siblings (孟 <i>meng</i>)
Positive trait	flourishing (華 <i>hua</i>); fine, good (佳 <i>jia</i>)
Personal achievement	surpass, lead (冠 <i>guan</i>); merit (勳 <i>xun</i>)
Esteeming erudition	Confucianism, learned man (儒 <i>ru</i>); book (書 <i>shu</i>)
Politics	imperial apartments (宸 <i>chen</i>); peace, governance (靖 <i>jing</i>); legendary king/hero (禹 <i>yu</i> , 羿 <i>yi</i>)
Equality	equal (均 <i>jun</i>)
Religion	divine protection (祐 <i>you</i>), good luck and well-being (禎 <i>zhen</i>)
Functional word	by (以 <i>yi</i>); again (又 <i>you</i>)

Table 5: Examples of Nonmetaphoric Usage in Gender-Neutral Names

women, and these characteristics are not found in gender-neutral names. Although there are some characters indicating individual achievement (9.4%), they are less when compared with boy’s names (23.2%).

Furthermore, with the popularization of education in Taiwan, esteeming erudition is also considered a trait relevant to both genders.⁴ In politics, unlike the words commonly associated with men directly related to politics (e.g., 政 *zheng* “politics”), characters related to legendary kings or heroes from ancient times, or more literary words, are employed. These terms have lower frequency of use in modern Mandarin and are less associated with either gender.

Words invoking divine protection and well-being are commonly incorporated into gender-neutral names as parents aspire for their children to lead happy and blessed lives, transcending gender stereotypes. Finally, the inclusion of function words is a common strategy in creating gender-neutral names. Because of their abstract nature, these words lack substantive meaning, making them less likely to be associated with a specific gender.

Gender-Neutral Names Categorized by Metaphors

Similar to nonmetaphoric qualities, there is little overlap between characters used in gender-neutral names and gender-specific names. For instance, the character for the season autumn is commonly found in girl’s names, and it is more frequently utilized for girls (n = 115) than for boys (n = 81) as gender-neutral names (Table 6).

Regarding plants, there are no characters representing flowers, which are strongly associated with femininity. A tree like birch, not inherently associated with either gender, is used fairly evenly in both genders’ names (570 tokens for girls and 560 for boys). Another tree, cypress, is primarily associated with boy’s names.

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Subcategory	Examples
Plant	birch (樺 <i>hua</i>); bamboo (竹 <i>zhu</i>); cypress (柏 <i>bo</i>)
Nature	continued rain (霖 <i>lin</i>)
Precious stone	gold (金 <i>jīn</i>); jade (瑜 <i>yú</i>)
Animal	feather (羽 <i>yǔ</i>); flying (翺 <i>yí</i>)
Season	autumn (秋 <i>qiū</i>)
Object	canvas (帆 <i>fān</i>); soft leather (韋 <i>wei</i>)

Table 6: Examples of Metaphor Usage in Gender-Neutral Names

While it appears in gender-neutral names, it is also more frequently linked with boys, with 108 occurrences compared to 84 occurrences for girls. Bamboo symbolizes various virtues like resilience, flexibility, humility, and modesty, qualities considered as general virtues transcending genders.

In the animal realm, there are no characters for “dragon” or “phoenix,” but concepts related to birds, such as feathers and the appearance of flying, are present. Other natural elements or materials such as gold, canvas, and soft leather do not conventionally carry gendered connotations and are used in names for both genders.

Gender-Specific Names: Diachronic Analysis

We plotted the 11 age groups on the *x*-axis and converted the data into ratios. First, we analyze the nonmetaphoric usage (Figure 5). Between 1920 and 1940, the prevalent girl’s names primarily revolved around appearance and virtues. However, by 1960, a shift occurred, introducing a variety of characteristics, notably positive traits and words associated with positive emotions, intelligence, and family. This diachronic change illustrates that the focus on traditional expectations for women, centered on appearance and traditional virtues, has diversified over time.

As for men, the attribute most emphasized has been personal achievements from 1920s to 2000s. However, compared to 1920–1930, the categories in subsequent years have also become more diverse. In the 40–50s, the quality “strength” became an important aspect, and “light” remained a recurrent category until the 1960s. In the *Yin-Yang* system, the original meaning of *Yang*, representing “masculine,” is associated with sun and light, and words related to light are considered positive and regularly associated with men.

Appearance, politics, and wealth are also present, but they are not primary or persistent characteristics. Eruditeness has remained a stable characteristic

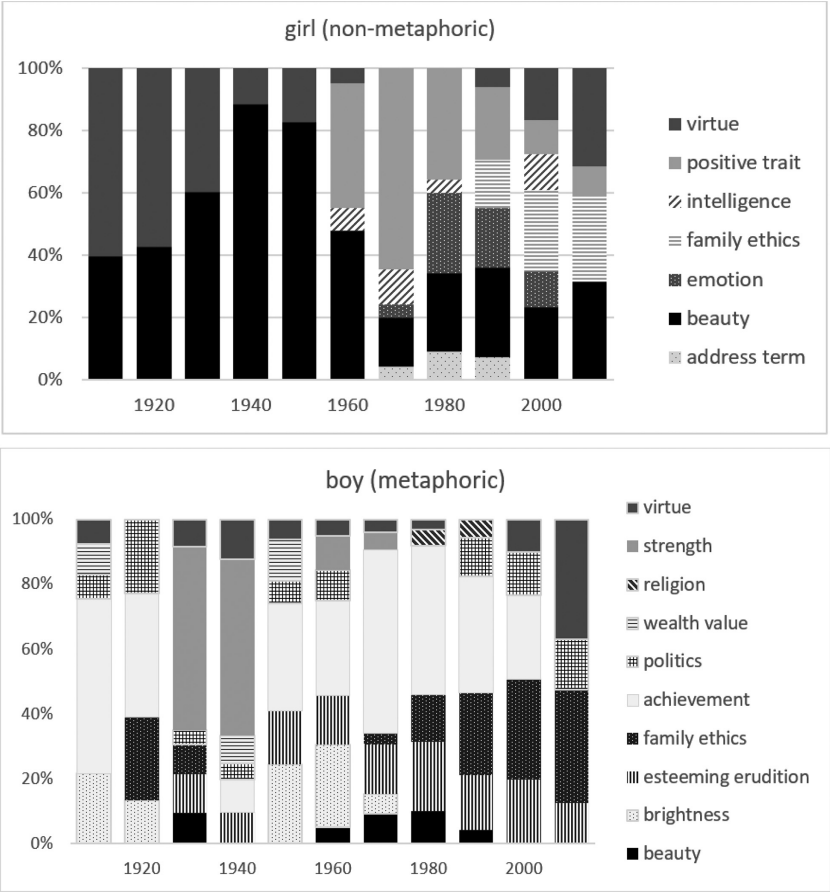


Figure 5: The diachronic change of nonmetaphoric usage in both gender’s names.

from 1930 to the present. Finally, similar to girl’s names, after the 2000s, each category became more even, and the traditional emphasis on personal achievement disappeared after the 2010s.

Regarding metaphoric attributes (Figure 6), plants have consistently played a significant role in girl’s names, particularly flowers:

From the beginning, the beauty of flowers has been interchangeable with the beauty of women. This phenomenon is intrinsic to Chinese thought and language. Almost all characters describing beauty have the radical of “woman” and, therefore, belong to the category of the feminine image. (Barnhart, 1983, p. 84–85)

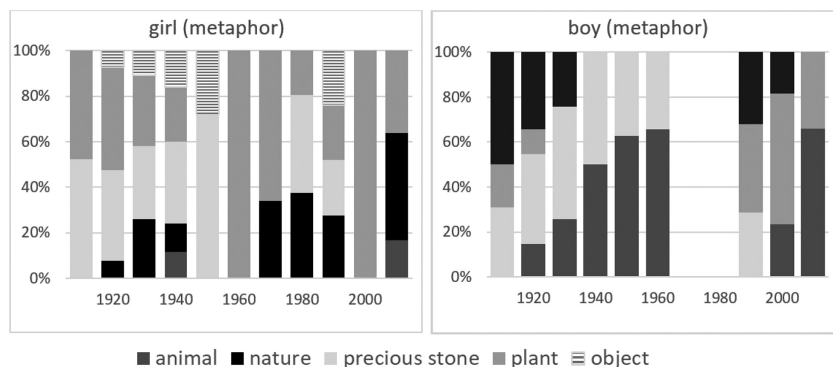


Figure 6: The diachronic change of metaphor usage in both gender's names.

Precious stones, especially those related to jade, also play an important role in girl's names, but this practice seems to be less common after 2000. There are also characters related to water, but the ratio is not as prominent as the other two categories. There were representations related to natural elements in the 1930s and 1940s, and they resurfaced after the 2000s. However, it should be noted that their qualitative performance differs (cf. "Gender-Specific Names: Synchronic Analysis" section). Before the 2000s, two characters, moon (月 *yue*) and cloud coloring (雯 *wen*), were prominent, but they are now considered outdated by the younger generation. Since the 2000s, the character for clear sky (晴 *qing*) has become the most popular in the nature-related category. Animals also had some presence, but it was not consistent across time, and the type changed from "phoenix" to "feather."

When it comes to men's names, there were no metaphoric elements found in the 1970s–1980s. Precious stone and gold prevailed from the 1910s to the 1950s. The category of "animals" continued to increase from the 1920s to the 1960s, featuring only the "dragon." After the 1990s–2000s, "trees" made a comeback, and so did the animals, but similar to women's names, the types changed. More specifically, the character for tree (木 *mu*) is only found between 1912 and 1930, while the character for cypress (柏 *bo*) is found between 1990 and 2018; the animal transitioned from "dragon" to "feather." This shift indicates that the traditionally expected masculine qualities, represented by dragons, have been diluted in modern times.

Table 7 shows the variance of subcategories in boy's and girl's names that we observed in the previous figures. Those exhibiting greater diversity are highlighted in bold.

The findings suggest that there is greater diversity in the characteristics of boy's names compared to girl's, including variations in characters, radicals, and

	Character	Radical	Metaphor	No metaphor
Boy	4.984282	3.417794	0.356143	1.14431
Girl	3.810885	1.905443	0.453541	0.554318

Table 7: Gender-Based Variance in Subcategories: Logarithmic Type-Token Ratio

nonmetaphoric features. This observation complies with the patterns in our corpus, where girls share more identical names, signifying a lower variability in given names within this group. This is connected to the historical status of women. Given the relatively lower social standing of women, their appellations frequently stem from their familial relationships with men, such as being identified as the daughter, wife, or mother of someone. Consequently, the significance of their names is often perceived as less than that of men, and the qualities emphasized tend to align with various societal stereotypes (Watson, 1986).

Conversely, girl’s names demonstrate a greater diversity in metaphoric usage compared to boy’s names. Historically, owing to the greater power wielded by men and their authority in language creation, women are frequently perceived as the “Other” in contrast to men, who embody the “Self” (Spender, 1980). As a result, women are more prone to dehumanization and are more readily metaphorically compared to various elements (Baider & Gesuato, 2003; Morris & Goldenberg, 2015). For example, their beauty and youth may be metaphorically linked to flowers, while their tenderness is associated with water. These cultural and societal symbols also manifest in naming practices.

Finally, Table 8 shows the statistical significance of the subcategories in predicting the feminine ratio of characters.

The result from simple linear regression shows that several subcategories have a significant effect when it comes to predicting the feminine ratio of names. The subcategory “beauty,” “nature,” “plant,” “precious stone,” and “season” are positively correlated with the feminine ratio of characters. That is to say, characters

Character	Metaphor	Subcategory	Men	Women	Count	Feminine ratio
美 <i>mei</i>	0	beauty	0	259786	259786	1.00
佳 <i>jia</i>	0	positive	796	33705	34501	0.98
均 <i>jun</i>	0	equality	1198	1182	2380	0.50
安 <i>an</i>	0	family ethics	915	861	1776	0.48
家 <i>jia</i>	0	family ethics	37646	939	38585	0.02
冠 <i>guan</i>	0	personal achievements	29566	471	30037	0.01

Table 8: Sample of Data Showing How the Feminine Ratio of Characters Is Calculated

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referring to subcategories, such as beauty and nature are more likely to be found in girl's names. On the other hand, the subcategories "personal achievements" and "wealth value" are negatively correlated with the feminine ratio of characters. These two subcategories are more likely to be found in boy's names. These findings match with our observations in the previous figures.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis on both gender-specific and gender-neutral names; however, it also has limitations. The analysis of cross-temporal shifts in neutral-gender naming practices is constrained by limited data availability. Have these names changed or will they change over time? To address this question, data from previous years or long-term observations are necessary for quantitative analyses. Additionally, we currently do not have information about parents' motivations for choosing gender-neutral names. Are they consciously seeking names that are less tied to traditional gender associations? What is their own gender awareness? These aspects warrant discussion, possibly by integrating other data sources, such as forums or interviews to offer a qualitative perspective on the subject.

Through an examination of the most frequently used names for women and men in Taiwan, both diachronically and synchronically, we observed first a higher diversity in boy's names. This diversity spans characters, radicals, and subcategories, including personal achievements, appreciation for erudition, political affiliations, wealth value, strength, and military prowess. This pattern underscores societal expectations for men to excel and be engaged in more public spheres, suggesting a perceived higher standard for men compared to women, and linked to the conventional notion that men serve as the primary breadwinners within the family, commonly correlated with individual accomplishments and advanced education.

On the contrary, women-related subcategories are relatively sparse, with a higher concentration in the first two categories: appearance and positive traits. This pattern mirrors societal emphasis on women's appearance (Keyser-Verreault, 2023) and the prescribed expectations for them to be associated with positive characteristics such as "good" and "graceful," which are not involved personal achievement.

Through a diachronic analysis, we have seen the evolution of subcategories within and across genders. Gender stereotypes seem to decrease. For example, women's names have changed since the 1960s, moving away from two single categories: appearance and virtue, to becoming more diverse. This trend is in line with Taiwan's social and gender development trends.

Since the 1960s, Taiwan's industrialization and advancements in women's education have led to a notable rise in women's employment rates: from 36.3% in the 1960s to 51.5% in 2021, in comparison to men 87.1% in the 1960s to 66.9% in 2021 (Yu, 2023). Women have witnessed reduced exclusion in the political domain, highlighted by the election of the first female president (2016–2024) and a rise to 41.6% representation of female legislators since 2020. However, despite these advancements, the public sphere remains predominantly male-dominated, and traditional gender roles persist, with household responsibilities still largely considered the domain of women (Lu & Yi, 2005; Weng et al., 2020).

Through qualitative analysis, we observed a trend wherein both genders have gradually reduced the usage of words with strong gender connotations in their names, even when the same category is involved over time. Typically deemed outdated, examples include “dragon,” “wood,” “moon,” and so on. These terms are being supplanted by alternatives with relatively weaker gender associations, such as words associated with birds or varieties of trees.

“Brightness” is typically associated with men, as it is a typical feature of the notion Yang. However, after the 2010s, the word “(sky) clear” (晴 *qing*) has emerged as one of the most popular characters in girl's names. Regarded as poetic, it is frequently used in the heroines' names of idol dramas. This shift also challenges the traditional convention of assigning Yang-related words to men. These diachronic analyses correspond to findings from the Taiwan Social Change Survey, indicating a gradual weakening of gender stereotypes (Lu, 2011). Consequently, there is a corresponding trend in parental naming practices.

Regarding gender-neutral names, their percentage of nonmetaphoric usage and metaphoric ones fall between boy's and girl's names. These categories do not overlap with those traditionally associated with femininities, such as appearance, but align closely with masculine categories, such as personal achievement and esteemed erudition. Notably, a few specific categories, such as function words and terms expressing equality, are uniquely present in gender-neutral names.

It is implicit that within the context of Chinese naming practices, characters used in boy's names are regarded as more generic, and the qualities associated with masculinity are deemed applicable to both men and women due to their higher valuation. However, the reverse is not true: categories traditionally linked to women cannot be applied to men without facing devaluation. Yet, when it comes to metaphoric usage, there is a greater prevalence of metaphors applied to women. This conforms to studies indicating that women are more frequently compared to other things than men (Li, 2022).

This result also accords with Lieberman et al.'s (2000) study, highlighting that gender-neutral names often originate from masculine names and are generally seen as more favorable for girls than boys. This preference stems from the stricter

adherence to sex stereotyping faced by boys. Specifically, the inclination to avoid contamination plays a role, where those in a privileged position seek to prevent any mixing with those who are less privileged. As a result, parents may find it more acceptable to give their daughters names that share characteristics with boys, while hesitating to make a similar choice for their sons due to concerns about contamination (Lieberson et al., 2000, p. 1285).

The way in which names are given and conventions are followed in naming individuals within Chinese culture provides insights into the prevailing societal norms, values, and stereotypes associated with different genders. These ways and conventions mirror cultural attitudes toward gender roles, expectations, and societal perceptions of traits and characteristics associated with men and women.

Through this study, we addressed the research gap concerning gender-neutral names in Mandarin Chinese. The strategies employed in these names may offer characteristics that are nonbinary and gender-inclusive in the language. Besides, by analyzing the metaphoric and nonmetaphoric characteristics embedded within these names, we uncovered nuanced layers of meaning that reflect societal attitudes toward gender roles and expectations. This examination not only enriches our understanding of naming conventions but also offers valuable perspectives on the evolving dynamics of gendered expectations within Taiwanese society, contributing to broader discussions on societal change.

Notes

1. The pronunciation of Chinese characters is commonly represented through a system known as Pinyin. Pinyin is a romanization system for Mandarin Chinese developed to convey the sounds of the language using the Latin alphabet. In this article, Pinyin will be presented alongside Chinese characters in italicized form.
2. The Pinyin symbols “q” and “j” share the same place of articulation, differing only in their manner of articulation. In IPA notation, “q” is represented as /tɕʰ/, while “j” is denoted as /tɕ/.
3. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Taiwan (2016), the gender ratio is nearly equal (99.57%), indicating that there is, indeed, a higher prevalence of identical names among females from a synchronic perspective.
4. Between 1976 and 1987, the net enrollment rate of male students surpassed that of female students. Yet, as higher education became more widespread, the gender disparity diminished. By 1988, the net enrollment rate of women exceeded that of men for the first time, with figures of 16.04% for women and 15.86% for men. Fast forward to 2021, the rate stood at 80.66% for women and 71.41% for men (Ministry of Education in Taiwan, 2023).

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As the Introduction of *The Handbook of Linguistic Human Rights* notes, international discussions of linguistic rights as human rights commenced in the late 1980s with a UNESCO-backed seminar. This was followed in the early 1990s with academic works on linguistic rights within an explicit human rights frame: the editors cite Gromacki (1992) and an anthology on “linguistic human rights,” which they edited (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994). In fact, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson had published on linguistic human rights as early as 1990 (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1990) and had been publishing together even before that (e.g., Phillipson et al., 1985). That is, this Handbook’s editors have been at the helm of research on linguistic human rights from the start, as well as their conceptualization and advocacy.

I undertook to review this Handbook shortly before one of its editors, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, passed away in May 2023. The book is her last publication among literally hundreds of articles, chapters, and books (see www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/en/all_publications.html). This Handbook is an enormous final collaboration with her co-editor and husband, Robert Phillipson, along with 60 contributors. The contributors include speakers of Indigenous and minoritized languages, esteemed UN office holders and a Special Rapporteur, government and

elected officials, lawyers, language advocates and academics, and many fall into several categories at once. The Handbook includes 52 chapters and runs to over 700 pages.

The Editors' Introduction

The first chapter is by the editors and focuses on “concept clarification” (p. 3). In doing so, it provides an analytic recapitulation of key definitions and their mismatches. It reviews international law and explains why linguistic human rights are fewer but more fundamental than language rights: “Only language rights which are so fundamental that every individual has them because that individual is a human being, so inalienable that no state is allowed to violate them, and which are necessary for individuals and groups to live a dignified life, are linguistic human rights” (p. 16).

The chapter also reintroduces the key concepts of linguicism and linguistic genocide with which Skutnabb-Kangas has become associated. This chapter is therefore one of the book's most useful as a reference work. The Introduction is admirably concise; however, given the breadth of the book, it may have been useful to include a summary of each part within it. Rather, its overview of the book's subsequent 51 chapters is less than one page in total, and even coupled with the individual chapter titles, this makes the book somewhat challenging to navigate. I therefore recommend that readers begin with the freely available summary for each chapter on the publisher's web page. These summaries are not printed, unfortunately, within either the e-book or hard copy.

The ideas introduced in this first chapter are then developed in the nine other chapters of Part I, which explore the theme “Approaches to Linguistic Human Rights” and in the eight chapters of Part II on “International Standards for Linguistic Human Rights.” Parts III and IV then provide case studies: first, 14 chapters studying linguistic human rights violations in Part III and then 12 chapters studying the implementation of linguistic human rights in Part IV. Part V is entitled “Cross-cutting Issues in Linguistic Human Rights” and contains eight chapters.

Overview of Part I: Approaches to Linguistic Human Rights

Some chapters in Part I recapitulate certain fields of scholarship, including Robert Dunbar's Chapter 2 about the place of linguistic human rights within international law and Stephen May's Chapter 3 about political theory, political philosophy, and sociolinguistics. May (p. 47) summarizes these bodies of literature by organizing them around three themes: firstly language ecology and secondly language mobility, and he does not shy from critiquing while summarizing; he

deals especially deftly with political theories critical of minority language rights that advocate English as “a ‘neutral’ language [... and that its] acquisition will inevitably enhance social mobility.” These theorists mistake English for a “monolithic category,” which demonstrates “a fundamental naivete’ among these political theorists about the relationship between language varieties and access to power and opportunity” (p. 47). A related argument is that their naivete’ is for want of interdisciplinary curiosity: language variation and power are already central to sociolinguistic studies. May argues that sociolinguists are leading the integration with political theory in their uptake of “linguistic justice,” a theme that serves as the third of his three, the origins of which he traces back to political philosophy.

Kathleen Heugh’s Chapter 4 then introduces the reader to important concepts: coloniality; de-coloniality; and erasure, with a focus on both linguistic and epistemic erasure in Africa. Erasure here means the “appropriation, denial or invisibilisation of Africa’s contributions to humanity” (p. 55), following Diop (1974), but calls to mind erasure as an archetypal language ideology as proposed by Irvine and Gal (2000). Ahmed Kabel’s Chapter 10 compliments Heugh’s. Kabel takes forward the critique of the individualism and Eurocentrism of international human rights (important in and of itself to include in this Handbook), exploring how the individual human subject to whom the rights attach is determined by the global market and its neoliberal paradigm. He links this to colonialism and coloniality and therefore ends with “a decolonial design for linguistic human rights” (pp. 165–169).

François Grin’s Chapter 6 carefully explains an economic approach that could be used “to broaden support base language rights” (p. 104) in order to transform linguistic human rights into government policies. Grin “fine-tune[s] the [economic] concept of the common good” (p. 104) by exploring the “tolerability” of language rights to those who could oppose their granting. His point is pragmatic: “not all rights are equally easy for the majority to countenance” (p. 103). Grin proposes that language rights are more tolerable when “perceived as explicitly compatible with the values, interest and priorities that members of the majority community consider crucial”; “clearly circumscribed rather than open-ended”; and “manifestly essential” (p. 103).

The editors each contribute a chapter in Part I reflecting on possible changes ahead in approaches to linguistic human rights. Skutnabb-Kangas’ Chapter 7 asks what prevents the implementation of linguistic human rights in the education of “Indigenous and Tribal peoples, Minorities, and Minoritized peoples,” and thus what could change. Given that the impediments are not scientific/pedagogic but political/ideological, she focuses on two ideological hierarchies that need to change: (1) informal education as less worthwhile than formal education and (2)

literacy as more valuable than oracy. Her third focus is submersion education, which assumes that a mother tongue is a deficiency and aims to have children acquire the dominant language at its expense. Phillipson's Chapter 9 debates whether we should nowadays consider advocating a linguistic human right to learn English, but ultimately comes down against it. Phillipson (p. 143) reminds us that "referring to English as 'global' [...] is misleading, since less than half the world's population have any proficiency in English."

Other chapters within Part I develop approaches to linguistic human rights via specific, empirical studies. These include chapters about Myanmar (Chapter 8) and Indonesia (Chapter 5). The empirical evidence in Joseph Lo Bianco's study of Myanmar is rare and includes his records of dialogues he facilitated for UNICEF between 2014 and 2016, before the violent coup. His reflection emphasizes the hard-won but real capacity for dialogue to shift stakeholder opposition and build political consensus for protecting linguistic human rights in law. The theory he derives from this case study is that "two overlapping but distinct activities are involved in a politics of linguistic human rights: agnostic political contest and deliberated solutions writing" (p. 129) and his conclusion is of general application: "because rights declarations and laws involve multiple interests, they must be negotiated initially and renegotiated continually" (p. 139). Lo Bianco also contextualizes the words *Myanmar* (rather than *Burma*) and *Rohingya*, now common in the news, within an extreme politicization of the right to use specific languages for naming.

The Indonesian case study examines whether local health authorities respected a constitutional right to access information in terms of the language of COVID-19 information on their websites; they did not. This chapter illustrates an approach that is probably common—a government not using the languages the public uses in favor of communicating in an official language—although the chapter does not engage with the global relevance of this approach or delve into the claim that "language discrimination is an infringement of human rights" (p. 90). Readers who are interested in the international rights to health and to linguistic nondiscrimination as well as an international rights-based approach to governments' COVID-19 communications may enjoy Grey (2023a). Moreover, Elsa Stamatopoulou's Chapter 13 in Part II can be read alongside Part I to expand the reader's understanding of a human rights-based approach to language. She positions linguistic human rights within cultural human rights and explains that international jurisprudence developed to recognize "continuing violations." In relation to language, this concept allows for recognition of the seriousness of language suppression, even if it began in the past; time does not extinguish state responsibility because the violation continues down the generations. Stamatopoulou

(p. 205) argues that this concept “makes it understood from the state that dealing with language rights is a process and requires a long commitment on the part of the state to reverse the injustice.”

Kathleen Heugh's contribution in Part I (Chapter 4, noted earlier) also includes a short case study of South Africa to exemplify “the way that new political elites can appropriate the discourse of language rights to support interests of exclusion, inequality and segregation rather than social justice or linguistic human rights” (p. 61)—a sound warning.

Overview of Part II: International Standards

Part II expands on Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, and Dunbar's early chapters about the linguistic human rights framework and especially its gaps and challenges. Most of these chapters examine the global linguistic human rights framework, with Kirstin Henrard contributing the exception in Chapter 15, which is about the regional linguistic human rights framework in Europe.

The chapters with a global scope nevertheless generally have a concentrated focus. For example, Ole Henrik Magga's Chapter 14 traces the impact of a specific body, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, notably including its impact on the formulation of a language right in Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP Article 14 is about control over education and the language of instruction). Kirk R. Person's Chapter 17 is about a specific instrument, the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion. This 2020 Statement from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Bangkok was initially endorsed by 16 Asia-Pacific nations who “pledged to deepen their commitment to address key language-in-education issues impacting ethnic minority, migrant, and displaced children” (p. 251), yet it is unclear whether we should consider it part of the linguistic human rights framework because, as Person notes, it does not explicitly speak about rights.

Chapter 16 is about a specific international law dispute: whether Canada is violating Article 26, Article 2(3)(a), and Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) because its Indigenous Languages Act's provisions about languages are undefined and unenforceable, in contrast with the rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms for official language minorities. This legal complaint was summarily dismissed as inadmissible by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2021, but the four complainants, who are the chapter's authors, maintain that Canada is violating the ICCPR, and this chapter contains the complaint that they filed. The four authors also maintain that the dismissal was contrary to the procedure in the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on New Communications and Interim Measures, CCPR/C110/3. They therefore

suggest that “Complaints to the Special Rapporteurs on Minority Issues or the Rights of Indigenous Peoples may present a better alternative” than filing complaints with the Human Rights Committee or other treaty bodies (p. 237). This case illustrates some of the “shortcomings” of linguistic human rights, as Chapter 11 describes them (p. 177), or to use the more optimistic phrasing of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues in Chapter 12, these rights are a “work in progress” (p. 192).

Victoria Manning, Joseph J. Murray, and Alexandre Bloxs’ chapter (Chapter 18) rounds out Part II by focusing on a specific body working alongside the UN, the World Federation of the Deaf, and its advocacy of linguistic human rights for Deaf people. These include a right to access signed languages, which are natural and often first languages, and a right to not be discriminated against in using signed languages. This chapter is especially useful in explaining how international disability rights for Deaf people, primarily from the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, interact with cultural-linguistic minority rights.

Overview of Part III: Rights Violations

Part III includes multiple case studies from some big nations (Canada, India, China) but also reaches beyond them. It begins with Canada, which features both as a case study of rights violation (Chapter 19 regarding Inuktitut and Chapter 20 regarding Wəlastəkwey) and of rights implementation in the following Part IV (Chapter 35). I appreciated that Part III’s Canadian case studies provided perspectives of Indigenous authors. First, from an Inuit leader, Aluki Kotierk, on Inuit people’s resistance to government violations in Nunavut, and second by Wəlastəkwi academic, Andrea Bear Nicholas, and incorporating the voice of a late Wəlastəkwi woman, Margaret Polchies, together speaking up so linguicide and historicide in what is now New Brunswick are not forgotten. Chapter 21 then moves us south to the United States, where the Native American Languages Acts offer “some token support for language revitalization” and some funding but face a “countervailing drive for national unity and national education standards” (p. 313). Reyner makes the point that it actually benefits the nation overall to incorporate Indigenous languages and cultures in health and education.

The next three chapters of Part III focus on the People’s Republic of China. Zhou Minglang (Chapter 22) recaps the cautious uptake of Mandarin-language equivalents of the terms *language power*, *language rights*, and *linguistic human rights*. Zhou (p. 321) highlights a significant legal decision, a ruling in 2021 that “local autonomous laws and regulations that support the use of minority languages and scripts as the media of instruction in local schools are unconstitutional.” They breach Article 19 of the Constitution, which declares that the state promotes the

national common language, Putonghua (standardized Mandarin). This is despite the provision in Article 4 of a right to use and develop minority languages. (For details on this ruling see Grey, 2025, and many other limitations of Article 4 are examined ethnographically and legally in Grey, 2021.) Zhou also points to the current lack of practical support for Braille and sign language in China, which have only been offered legal support since the 1990s and policy support in the past decade. It is remarkable that this leading expert on Chinese language policy declares that he was wrong to have considered language rights as equal, even in theory, for minorities in China (p. 321). Two regional Chinese case studies follow. In Chapter 24, three Uyghur language specialists outline the changing language policies in Xinjiang from 1949 up to the present-day disestablishment of Uyghur as an official regional language and language of instruction. They call for China's infringements of international conventions and the threat of genocide to be addressed.

In Chapter 23, scholar and language rights advocate Gerald Roche provides an account of language minoritization in Tibet that is constructive in identifying a problem that confronts language advocates the world over: denial of linguistic diversity and of language oppression. Roche reflects both on how to address denial and how to cope with it: “[c]onfronting the reality of denial will hopefully provide a shortcut to the sort of disenchantment that prolonged advocacy requires” (p. 337) and over time a “‘culture of acknowledgement’ can be created” by “build[ing] social nodes and networks where acknowledgement flourishes” (p. 338). To this end, I commend the online reading group about this Handbook that Roche organized in 2023 (readers can request access to its Facebook page via <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1986980504843528>) and recommend a freely accessible blog he wrote with the Ngarigu scholar Jakelin Troy about Indigenous language denialism in Australia (Roche & Troy, 2020).

Moving our focus to India, Shivani Nag contributes a particularly thoughtful chapter (Chapter 30) on linguistic human rights within the Indian education system. Framed in a reflection on her own experience of coming to see the epistemology of the powerful that her English-medium education had imparted—“a very neat, undisturbed, uncomplicated and linear discourse about my state, my country and the world” (p. 413)—Nag’s chapter is about a lack of epistemological diversity and a lack of access to higher education, which are maintained by language policy and practice. Almost all of India’s higher education is English-medium, and much of the primary and secondary schooling is in English, Hindi, and Sanskrit, even when both students and teachers struggle in English. Policy changes in 2009 and 2020 seem to support increased mother tongue primary schooling but, as Nag critiques, allow most schools to use mother tongues only as a temporary bridge to dominant-language-medium schooling and, in any case, maintain the almost

exclusive presence of English in tertiary schooling, which discourages the use of mother tongues in earlier years. Annamalai's overview in Chapter 29 of how groups come to be recognized as linguistic minorities in India compliments Nag's analysis. He explains that minorities "use political processes to get minority status so as to demand what they are legally entitled to [under the Constitution, which is] exclusive educational institutions to shield themselves from the language policy of the states" (p. 410). This is undermined, however, when Census categories are combined such that "mother tongues are 'majoritized' by the administration" and because "[m]arket-advantaged education [has] solidified the desire to use English as the medium of instruction in minority schools, like in the majority schools" (pp. 406–408).

These Indian chapters can therefore be read alongside Philipson's overt interrogation in Chapter 9 of whether we should consider a right to (choose) English, a right he eventually argues against. Nag (p. 417) explains that, in 2009, India's National Knowledge Commission called for the teaching of English to "our people, ordinary people" to reduce highly unequal access to higher education. Nag advocates equality for diverse students to not only engage in academic discourse but also to feel legitimate rather than self-doubting in doing so, through making academic discourse and instruction in India multilingual. It is a strength of this Handbook that multiple chapters circle the thorny problem of a linguistic human right to English.

Kurdistan may appear from the chapter titles to be the Handbook's only central Asian case study, but Chapter 25 is in fact about the differing language policies and rights relating to Kurdish in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, the 20th Century nations that came to be established across the Kurdish speaking area. Jaffer Sheyholislami compares, for example, the overt and violent assimilationist policies in Turkey with the covert but equally assimilationist policies in Iran and contrasts both with the relatively new legal and practical strength of Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish-controlled Rojava region of Syria. (The name is deictic, indexing the west of Kurdistan.) This control was an outcome of the "Arab Spring" in Syria in 2012.

The "Arab Spring" also begins Chapter 27 on North Africa. Kabel discusses it along with the 1980s "Berber Spring" in Algeria and then Morocco which fueled demands for officialization of the Amazigh language. These demands were met in "meagre" form in response to the "Arab Spring" in 2011 in Morocco and 2016 in Algeria, but not in Tunisia or Libya (p. 387). Kabel's (p. 389) work is thought-provoking, for instance describing the Amazigh movement as "hostage to the discourse of pluralism and inclusion." He explains both movements as pushing back against Arabization and unified Arabo-Islamic national identities, which were aspects of unfinished coloniality in North African nations. The Handbook remains in Africa for the next chapter (Chapter 28) about English imperialism in Ethiopia:

“In Ethiopia, English barely exists outside the classroom” (p. 394), and yet it is the only medium of instruction from high school onward. Woldeyes (p. 400) attributes this to gatekeeping by political elites and a misrecognition of the poor and falling academic performance across the country as a result of “technical shortcomings” rather than of language ideology.

Chapter 31 is a 2021 speech by Haiti’s ambassador to UNESCO. In Haiti: “100% of the population speak Haitian Creole, and less than 10% are also native French speakers [... Yet] almost 50% of the population is illiterate. [... This is] the impact of literacy in French predominating over literacy instruction in the mother tongue” (p. 428). Tapping into the focus that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on our interdependence, she memorably decries that “the most important person is being left behind, oneself, and with it, the whole nation” (p. 428).

Finally, there are two European studies in Part III. Csernicskó and Kontra examine the Ukraine in Chapter 26. Their chapter was written prior to the current war but speaks to language issues as a catalyst for political tensions and a “pretext for the Russian military intervention” (p. 374). Csernicskó and Kontra note that “Since 2014 [...] the main goal of language laws has been the restriction of the use of Russian [...] However, several smaller minorities have also become the targets of the [Ukrainian] monolingual ethno-nationalist state,” then giving a short case study of the situation of Hungarian. Dieter W. Halwachs’ Chapter 32 succinctly sets out the circumstances of Romani—“a stateless diaspora language” (p. 432)—and the movement by its speakers for official recognition within Europe as not only an ethnolinguistic group but a nonterritorial nation. He briefly compares language planning and policy efforts which have pushed for codification and orthography across the Romani varieties in order to bolster the claim to nationhood (as a people, not as a nation-state), which are typically top-down and unsuccessful, with planning and policy focusing on maintaining varieties of Romani. Those are typically bottom-up and more successful. He canvasses the limited protection created by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, explaining that “only 16 [countries] have recognised Romani,” and even their legal obligations are “only partly fulfilled” (p. 437). Halwachs (p. 438) makes an insightful assessment of why Charter protection continues to fall short: “either ratification neglects the sociolinguistic situation of Romani, or a state has chosen an equality approach for all traditional minority languages spoken on its territory. To follow the latter approach and assign functions in the domains of administration and public services, the judiciary, and economy to a dominated minority language without any literary tradition is short-sighted.”

Halwachs’ (p. 439) general reflection on the role of linguistic human rights for minority languages segues to Part IV’s case studies of implementation: “legal

protection is always an important but only a first step towards guaranteeing LHRs,” a step that does not lead to more unless governments and people have a “pluralistic habitus.”

Overview of Part IV: Rights Implementation

Much of the literature about linguistic human rights is about struggle, separation from language, and social exclusion. This Handbook's editors have curated an important counterpoint in Part IV on the implementation of linguistic human rights (or at least their partial implementation, to follow the qualification Ajit Mohanty's makes in Chapter 42 on Odisha in India). Gabriela Pérez Báez and Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil's Chapter 37 begins with the uplifting news of Indigenous Lefweluan Mapuche woman, linguist, and linguistic human rights advocate Dr. Elisa Loncón Antileo's election as president of Chile (p. 493).

Within the two parts of case studies, Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) alone represents Oceania, and Richard Benton's Chapter 43 about it in Part IV offers another hopeful account. Benton's chapter engages with the particular roles of domestic and international language rights. It introduces readers to a thought-provoking debate about who uses language rights, and to what end: “Some Māori would prefer to have a negative language right: the right to exclude non-Māori from Māori language classes and education” (p. 582). Benton places the implementation of a right to te reo Māori (the Māori language) in education within three informative contexts. First, as a response led by Māori people to urbanization, which I found a good parallel to discussions in Grey (2021) on urbanization and minority languages in China. Second, within a context of the waxing and waning of other language rights, for example, rights to use Māori in media, in courts, and in parliament. From my own perspective as a language-and-law researcher, I found these latter aspects especially interesting. I also found them interesting in comparison with a country not covered in the book, Australia, where there is a dissimilar history regarding Indigenous language use in parliament but a similar absence of language as a prohibited ground for discrimination in national legislation (Grey, 2023b). And finally, Benton highlights the better implementation of rights (albeit not complete) in relation to te reo Māori relative to New Zealand Sign Language, Pacific Island languages, and immigrant languages in New Zealand, all of which have at least some state support.

The other implementation case studies examine Finland (Chapter 33 on Finnish and Swedish, Chapter 36 on Sámi languages, and Chapter 39 on Karelian); Russia (Chapter 40, and Chapter 39 about the Republic of Karelia within the Russian Federation); Mexico (Chapter 37); Sweden (Chapter 34 on national mi-

nority languages); Canada (Chapter 35); the United States (Chapter 38 on Pueblo Indigenous languages and Chapter 44 on the struggle to make Gallaudet University bilingual in American Sign Language and English); and Nepal (Chapter 41).

These case studies highlight common forms of domestic law implementing linguistic human rights, including: constitutions (Canada, Finland, India, Mexico, Nepal, Russia, Sweden); charters/bills of human rights (Canada, NZ); antidiscrimination legislation (Sweden); education legislation (Finland, Mexico, Russia, Sweden); a “Languages Act” (Canada, Finland, NZ, Russia, Sweden); legislation on national minority languages (Sweden); and legislation on Indigenous peoples’ linguistic rights (Mexico). In some of the studies, court cases and education policies play larger roles than legislation, but, overall, legislation is clearly seen to be important. Nevertheless, Báez and Gil (p. 499) note that “legislation alone is not sufficient to foster and enable the necessary action to effectively protect and promote linguistic human rights in practical terms,” and this resonates across the chapters.

Overview of Part V: Cross-Cutting Issues

Part V of the Handbook’s focuses on how a linguistic human rights approach could transform the use of key resources and the academic or political discourses about them. These include greater access to interpreting and translation (Chapter 45), “more just and inclusive” language testing (p. 605, Chapter 46), community control over language documentation (Chapter 47), developing free Internet technology—specifically the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages’ Living Dictionaries app¹—to help language protection and revitalization (Chapter 48), and more multilingual disaster communications (also known in the literature as *crisis communications*) from governments and international organizations (Chapter 49). Ruanni Tupas (p. 655) contributes Chapter 50, arguing that mother-tongue–based multilingual education, a topic of recent political debate in the Philippines, “needs a linguistic human rights framework, embedded within the imperative to remember how and why the mother tongues have been colonially constructed in people’s lives.”

This part concludes with a two-chapter epilogue by the editors. Chapter 51 annotates a list of examples of creative works that sit outside the academic literature on linguistic human rights but vividly illustrate advocacy for such rights, embody them, or call out their abuse. In Chapter 52, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson reflect on the sorry state of the world and on institutional support for realizing linguistic human rights. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (p. 681) therefore contemplate that “pursuing linguistic human rights can best be undertaken decentrally within individual countries, on grassroots initiatives” while drawing on

the knowledge of activists, academics, and policymakers elsewhere in our “digitalised world.” They recapitulate the Handbook’s many studies identifying the barriers and threats to linguistic human rights that need to be overcome. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (p. 685) conclude by emphasizing that the Handbook speaks to the “significance of linguistic human rights for social and linguistic justice [...] for] a healthy, more just future for individuals and communities [...] and for organisations whose goal is to establish peace.”

The Value of This Handbook

It is worth asking whether this Handbook is a seminal reference work because the price tag, around AU\$300, makes it a less accessible point of reference than might be desirable. This Handbook is unusually long, and the contributors’ approaches to writing reference works vary. The Handbook certainly includes accessible chapters that are useful starting points for research students and academics. For example, the first chapter of Part I, Robert Dunbar’s review of linguistic human rights in international law, offers an overview the likes of which I have sought and never elsewhere found², and earlier I have commended the Introduction’s clarification of key concepts. Certain other chapters would surely have been more thoroughly edited and referenced had the editors’ circumstances not been extenuating. Very few chapters maintain the conceptual distinction between linguistic human rights and language rights that Skutnabb-Kangas makes a point of in the Introduction.

The Handbook’s editors make an important claim at the outset: “That it is possible to identify with a language that one does not know. It is possible to have a mother tongue that one does not have (any or “full”) competence in” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 2023, p. 6). Knowing that this claim will be unexpected to many, the editors explain why they define a “mother tongue” as including not simply the first languages children speak but also languages with which communities have strong affiliations but which they have been prevented from transmitting to children. In short, the editors argue that defining “mother tongue” in a narrower way would be unjust for “Indigenous and Tribal peoples, Minorities, and Minoritized peoples.” Later, Nag’s (p. 413) opening line of Chapter 30 recalls this point: “I knew that Kangri was my mother tongue, but I did not know Kangri.” And yet the Handbook struggles overall to explain the just role of education for children who start school already without their mother tongue. Many chapters note that teaching in a medium of instruction that children do not know reduces their learning (although the unknown language is typically a socially dominant one), but at the same time providing the support for learning mother tongues is an important human rights obligation of a state.

In the online reading group, Joseph Lo Bianco asked how we could better align academics' communities' and policymakers' interests, and whether, as we read the Handbook, we could "develop a theory of change (or anti-change) about implementation of linguistic human rights, what's needed to shift from academic accounts of how and why linguistic human rights are prevented from being implemented, to concrete action for rights in practice."³ Reading with this purpose in mind, the Handbook is a valuable anthology of experiences illustrating how those varied interest groups respond to linguistic diversity and hierarchy.

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Notes

1. <https://livingdictionaries.app>
2. See also the review of case law in de Varennes (2007).
3. Quoted with permission, correspondence 13/11/2023 on file with the author.

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***Language Contact in Nepal: A Study on Language Use and Attitudes,*
Bhim Lal Gautam (2021). Switzerland:
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Language contact plays a role in bridging gaps in intercultural communication. Nepal, renowned for its unity in diversity, is home to over 128 languages (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021), and although many of these languages differ significantly, contact between them is crucial for their functional use. The linguistic landscape is especially complex in a multilingual country such as Nepal. In cosmopolitan areas like Kathmandu, multiple languages fulfill essential roles. Nepali, the national language spoken by the majority, functions alongside English, a dominant foreign language, and Hindi, a widely used second language, to connect people across cultural, linguistic, caste, ethnic, and economic divides.

Migration, modernity, globalization, and technological advances have significantly influenced language contact in Nepal, often resulting in language switching and shifting within multilingual communities. The number of speakers of specific languages has diversified due to the instrumental purposes these languages serve in both social and global contexts. This evolving linguistic scenario has created new opportunities for sociolinguistic research. In particular, in multilingual settings such as Nepal, interest in language ideologies and community attitudes continues to grow, offering insights into how people navigate their multilingual realities.

The above assertions have been interestingly discussed and interpreted with reference to contexts, verbatims, texts, and statistics in the different sections of the

book “Language Contact in Nepal: A Study on Language Use and Attitudes”. With these new insights gained, I have written a brief review of the contents of this book. This review echoes the message of this book and the statements presented in its opening pages are what motivated me to write this review.

Language contact has become a common phenomenon of a multilingual territory, where people from different nooks and crannies gather for different purposes, mostly because of migration and working conditions. We are able to perceive language contact as the process by which languages influence one another, and this influence is seen in interactions. In this regard, linguist Yaron Matras argues that language contact manifests in a “great variety of domains, including language acquisition, language processing and production, conversation and discourse, social functions of language and language policy, typology and language change” (2009: p.1).

This volume has explored the shape of languages spoken in Nepal, a context of language contact in a cosmopolitan city where migration is increasing in pace along with the influence of language contact in language substance, role and ideologies. This book has brought a wealth of research in the field of sociolinguistics by focusing on the issue of language contact in the multilingual cosmopolitan city of Kathmandu in Nepal, making it readily available for students, teachers, linguists, and language practitioners. It is perfect for those who have a particular interest in language contact, ideology, and attitudes, and is a credit of the PhD dissertation of the author (p.1). Divided into eight chapters, this book provides rich content related to the linguistic geography and sociolinguistic scenario of Nepal; meticulous review of related literature on the structure, figures, and practices of language use; explicit methodology; in-depth analysis of both quantitative and qualitative information from data triangulation; well-articulated findings; a soft but solid conclusion; and inputs for language policy implications. Moreover, it refutes research-based evidence on increasing cases of language shift and switch as a result of language contact.

As an outcome of the author’s own field and research experiences during the last 15 years in Nepal, this book has documented the minority and endangered languages of Nepal well and incorporates the experiences of various field visits during sociolinguistic surveys of Nepalese languages. According to the author, this book provides an opportunity for future researchers of South Asian languages to test the methodology of language contact study and learn more about the languages of the subcontinent. It has been hypothesized that this study of language contact phenomena in Nepal will enable researchers to document examples of language change among respective speakers/communities, which may then serve as a basis of comparison with linguistic varieties within

the region to energize prospective researchers in the exploration of some common typological features of South Asian languages from a language contact perspective.

The first chapter (Introduction) traces the context of the study on language contact in Nepal and the author's motivation to study in the realm of language contact, ideology, and attitudes. It also outlines the organization of the chapters, the rationale behind the methodology selected thus far for language contact study, and the objectives behind the study. Some of the objectives behind this writing are to discover the trends, causes, and impacts of language contact and shifts among speakers from the Kathmandu Valley and outside Nepal. More importantly, the author focuses their research to glean the answer to the question "How and why do people think and behave" in a particular way in a multilingual social setting. This chapter also sheds lights on the research methods employed in this study, research sites and features of language contact at the selected sites, analytical framework of language contact and shifts, nature and specification of the tools and approaches to distill the data, and draws inferences so as to present general trends of language contact and shift in a multilingual country.

Chapter 2, "Sociolinguistics of Multilingualism in Nepal," outlines the current sociolinguistic situation in Nepal, focusing on the notions of multilingualism and language contact. Linguistic diversity and language vitality in Nepal has been presented with reference to the ecological and cultural diversity of Nepal. The discussion is supported with data from the census and other published and unpublished documents related to languages, and the use of language by the speakers for academic, business, and communication purposes. Describing the major dimensions of sociolinguistics and multilingualism in the country, this chapter attempts to present an overview of Nepal's linguistic diversity based on the latest information on the status and vitality of Nepalese languages. These critical reflections on existing language provisions in the constitution and language policy of Nepal are relevant to readers in order to develop insights on the policies and provisions made for language use in this country. In a brief history of the Nepali language and its contact with many other languages, including English, over time, the author cautions that minority languages are knowingly or unknowingly being minoritized both from policy and practices. Therefore, language awareness is must for speakers, not only for prevention of the language becoming endangered, but also for linguistic revitalization. The various ideological and sociocultural aspects of language contact and shift in a multilingual setting, discussed in this chapter, allow the readers to examine the existing trend of contact and shifts for the purposes of language use.

Stressing the present-day multilingual context of Nepal and emphasizing the major tenets of language contact, Chapter 3, "Language Contact in Nepal," demar-

cates the essence and consequences of language contact. It critically assesses how language contact in a particular region may be shaped by many factors; for example, trade, migration, social prestige, dominant versus minority languages, political superiority, and so on. The author reminds us of the processes of convergence and divergence in language contact. Accordingly, convergence is a linguistic process leading to a reduction in linguistic distance between languages in contact—it is simultaneously a linguistic, historical, and social phenomenon, and has parallels in other areas of human behavior besides language, as well as some similarity with the phenomena of acculturation in anthropology and socialization in sociology. However, the process of divergence occurs when people use the same labels to identify different meanings. The combination of language convergence and meaning divergence can create potential for the illusion of shared meaning; that is, the tendency for shared language to create an impression of agreement where it does not exist. This chapter also presents the notion of multilingualism and language contact in Nepal with reference to the situation, causes (e.g., foreign employment, media and music, travel and tourism urbanization, migration), and multilingual practices throughout its history with a question of whether it is democratic or undemocratic. The author asserts that multilingualism is a proficiency acquired by an individual; however, patterns of multilingual proficiency should be studied throughout a community. In the discussion of language ideology and attitudes, the author cites information from relevant sources and presents that language ideologies are any set(s) of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use. From this review, I came to learn that within the study of language ideology, the work has to focus on speaker attitudes toward languages or language varieties in multilingual and multidialectal communities, with an underlying assumption that language loyalty is crucial for language maintenance, and for the maintenance of indigenous minority languages in particular. The review of language contact studies in Nepal presented at the end of this chapter sheds lights on research practices and their implications in the field of language contact within the territory of the nation.

As the author of the book studied the patterns of language contact, perplexing ideologies, and attitudes developed in native speakers of Sherpa, Newar, and Maithili languages, the provides Chapter 4 of this book presents details of language contact situations in the Sherpa-speaking community living in Kathmandu Valley. It introduces the Sherpa people and language, with a brief account of the ethnolinguistic situation in Kathmandu Valley. The author describes the various patterns of language use in the Sherpa community, and this chapter covers language contact and intergenerational shifts, language attitudes in the Sherpa community, and analysis of the causes and impacts of language contact among Sherpa. The main

findings of language contact in Sherpa show that native but migrated speakers of Sherpa language tend to shift to the use of English, Nepali, and Hindi instead of their own language for communication. The author indicates that Sherpa are motivated toward globalization and Western traditions. Sherpa have been directly involved in tourism and trekking, and regular contact with foreigners motivates them toward English rather than other languages. Migrated Sherpa living in the capital city have been directly and indirectly affected by globalization and international trade and communication. Moreover, they are involved in various social, cultural, and ceremonial activities within the new mixed society, which motivates them to shift to new target languages from their ancestral source language. The author concludes that existing political, social, and economic factors contribute to language contact and shift. Each finding of the study is supported with numerical and textual data.

In Chapter 5, “Language Contact in Newar,” the author informs us about the various aspects of language contact in Newar. Readers will come to learn about the Newar people and their language, and their profile in Kathmandu Valley. Critical examination of the different patterns of language use in Newar as well as language contact and intergenerational shift indicate that a significant number of Newar native speakers are encouraged and somehow forced toward use of the nation’s lingua-franca language, i.e., Nepali and the dominant international language—English. The author also presents the causes and impacts of language contact in Newar with data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings, presented at the end of this chapter, conclude that the mother tongue is heavily used in cultural and religious activities, but Nepali is dominantly used in social, official, ceremonial, and media-related activities, whereas English and Hindi are used in media, ceremonial, and official activities. The influence of English is much greater than Hindi among Newar people, which indicates the influence of globalization and Western traditions. Newar communities are directly involved in official and academic activities as well as tourism, which motivates them to communicate with foreigners in English and Nepali rather than other languages. By and large, this study shows that Newar living in the capital city have been influenced directly and indirectly by globalization, international linkage, and communication. Moreover, they have been involved in various social, cultural, and ceremonial activities within the new mixed society, which motivates them to shift to new target languages from their ancestral source language.

Following the same pattern of discussion of the Chapters 4 and 5, in Chapter 6 “Language Contact in Maithili,” the author further highlights the patterns of language use in different aspects of language contact in the Maithili speech community residing in the Kathmandu Valley. It consists of an introduction of the Maithili language, including its demographic profile in the Kathmandu Valley,

and sheds light on the patterns of language use. With extensive use of textual and statistical data collected using multiple tools, the author assesses language contact and intergenerational shifts in the Maithili speech community living in Kathmandu Valley. The rigor of the author is seen in their analysis of the causes and impacts of language contact from ideological perspectives. Readers can gain insights on the pattern of language contact, causes of language contact, and impact on communication to Maithili speakers from the findings presented at the end of this chapter. Accordingly, Maithili speakers mostly use their mother tongue during family, cultural, or religious activities, and less for the purpose of outside contact, such as in the marketplace or business. However, there is less use of Maithili in formal activities including education and administration. In the case of their immediate community or surroundings, there is a tendency to use Maithili as well as a second language. Newer generations use the Nepali language in different fields of application, such as for interpersonal communication and other specific purposes. However, the author argues that indications of a reduced use of the mother tongue are noticeable among newer generations. Nonetheless, older generations maintain the use of the mother tongue in several ways. Reflections on the ideological impacts of language contact in the Maithili-language community have added value to language contact studies, and the author argues that existing political, social, and economic factors play key roles contributing to language use and attitude.

In Chapter 7, titled “Language Shift in Nepal,” the author examines cases of language shift in Nepal and presents evidence to signify various shifts in the use of language(s) in a multilingual sociocultural setting. The author discusses trends in language shift, focusing on diverse domains of language use and the impact of language shift on different languages spoken in Nepal. Referencing four languages—Dotyali, Jumli, Tharu, and Nepali—the author assesses language shift with a question on whether any shift is found among the speakers of these languages from mother tongue to another language(s). Based on informant responses regarding the use of language in various activities, in this chapter the author describes the various trends and patterns of language shift in Nepal, where we can observe many different attitudinal aspects of language contact and shift. From the study of language shift in different activities, it has been presented that the use of mother tongues (other than Nepali) is found more in family and cultural or religious activities. However, such mother tongues are not dominantly used for communication in outside domains and contact areas, such as in marketplaces and business activities. Importantly, use of the mother tongue (again, other than Nepali) is less in formal activities including education and administration. In cases of the immediate community or surroundings, the tendency to use the mother tongue as well as a second language has been found to be applicable to more

or less all languages. The shift between languages in a multilingual country like Nepal is very complex and has created many obstacles in developing an appropriate language policy for the nation. The author claims that the high degree of shifting of minority languages toward Nepali, English, and Hindi is an indication of a future developing monolingual ideology.

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 8, “Language Contact and Implications to Language Policies,” concludes with findings derived from different studies. This chapter critiques language contact trends that have been explored, with reference to diverse activities under different domains of language use and attitudes among Sherpa-, Newar-, and Maithili-speaking communities, along with a general trend of language shift in Nepal. The author further explores the causes and impacts of language contact and shift, and discusses these with personal anecdotes, narratives, and stories from the field. The overall findings of studies on language contact and language shift conclude that mother tongues are strongly used during personal activities in informal settings within the family and language community. However, speakers of minority languages tend to shift their language to Nepali when they interact with interlingual social groups. The author summarizes that in most cases of languages within Kathmandu Valley and beyond, mother tongues are used noticeably for joking, singing inside, quarreling, family gathering, telling stories to the children, and religious and ritual activities of the respective language groups. However, Nepali is used more in activities such as counting, shopping/marketing, community meetings, singing outside, telling stories to others, and cultural programs. Regarding the causes and impact of language contact, the author concludes that the media, migration, and marriage have played influential roles in and become major causes of language contact and shift. Market forces and their consequent economic benefits are major determinants of this. In a similar vein, political-ideological state intervention in diverse social aspects including schooling/education has been found to have a strong effect on reinforcing language shift; i.e., the shift from local mother tongues to dominant national, regional, and global languages. The author argues that people’s motivation and migration for economic benefit have also been noted as key to encouraging people to adopt languages that deploy more instrumental functions in their job market. This chapter ends with some hands-on implications for the study, and the author concludes the book with some recommendations for language policy and planning.

Considering the question, “who is this book for?,” I think it’s for everyone. Indeed, this book appears to be useful for students, teachers, trainers, linguists, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners—anyone who has a particular interest in applied linguistics in general and sociolinguistics in particular. All of us belong to the use of language, with contact through language, and switching and shifting

its uses. The final sections of this book include a sociolinguistic questionnaire, bibliography, and index that are useful to learn about which research was used to draft the backbone of this book.

I like almost everything included in this book. Its perfection can be seen in theorizing the issue, reviewing the literature, shaping the methodology, and presenting analyses and interpretations so as to bring inferences of the study. Therefore, I appreciate the rigor of the research, good discussion of the context, and solid presentation of the findings in line with the objectives and research questions posed at the start. I really like the realistic scenario of language contact that it carries, evidence-based claims it makes, vivid representation of data from multiple sources and means, plain language to describe research findings, and the wider practical significance it deserves. Reading and reviewing this book provided me with insights for sociolinguistics research and it made me feel like the author has attempted their best to initiate the study and raise the conscious awareness of everyone involved in the discourse of language and its use. This book has a pervasive tone to encourage speakers to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage. In this regard, Turin (2019) argues that the preservation of linguistic and cultural heritage is at least in part the responsibility of government and aligned agencies (p. 151).

Without question, I strongly recommend this book for students, teachers, language researchers, language policy-makers, local stakeholders, language practitioners, and language campaigners, as I feel this book has the potential to raise issues of language contact and shifts in the use of endangered language, language promotion, language revitalization, multilingualism, and language policy discussion. This book presents a synopsis of mother tongues in Nepal and describes the ethnic identity and boundary maintenance of two dominant languages used for communication in Nepal (Nepali and English). Readers can examine how the pragmatic and instrumental functions of language contact have intersected in this book. As Turin (2021) evaluates, “the book helps the author achieve author’s ambitious goal of understanding the trends, causes and impacts of language contact and shift in Nepal, the author has subsumed vivid images of languages as they are in function in a multilingual social setting.” This book supports everyone by raising their attention toward the increasing issues of language contact and shifts.

However, nothing is perfect, and this book is no exception. One quibble is that it appears to overemphasize cases of language contact, causes, and impact, and critique has not been made visible to the issue of ideology and attitudes behind the use of different languages aside from one’s mother tongue. Some explanations on pertinent ideologies and changing attitudes toward the values given to individual languages could be included so that readers can better understand what different factors are deeply rooted behind the use of languages in their communication.

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***The Asturian Language: Distinctiveness, Identity, and Officiality.*
Avelino Corral Esteban (Ed.). (2023).
Berlin: Peter Lang. Pp. 258. ISBN:
9783631884683 (hbk), ISBN:
9783631884706 (epub)**

Reviewed by Luke Michael Bowe

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This edited volume, consisting of papers presented at the 1st International Conference on the Asturian Language, held at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in April 2022, stands as a valuable contribution to scholarship on the Asturian language. Across 20 chapters reflecting an array of disciplines and methodological approaches, *The Asturian Language: Distinctiveness, Identity, and Officiality* offers an ample panorama of current research on the language organized around its distinctiveness, its role in shaping the Asturian identity, and its push toward officiality, the three primary pillars of this book. The volume is particularly timely given the ongoing debates over the co-officiality of the language in Asturias.

Asturian is a minoritized romance language from northwestern Spain spoken by 100,000 to 200,000 native speakers, primarily in the Principality of Asturias, with approximately 400,000 to 650,000 bilingual speakers (Llera Ramo 2017). However, unlike Galician, Basque, Valencian, Catalan, and Aranese, which are co-official languages in the autonomous communities of Galicia, the Basque Country, Valencia, and Catalonia, respectively, Asturian has not yet achieved co-official status within the Principality of Asturias. Most recently, the May 2023 regional elections failed to secure sufficient support for a potential reform to the Asturian Statute of Autonomy, which would have included the co-officiality of Asturian. Nevertheless, those dedicated to studying, preserving, and transmitting the lan-

guage to future generations continue to do so, as evidenced in this volume, as they persist in pushing for its co-officiality. The contributions in the book, written in Castilian Spanish, Asturian, and English, demonstrate the breadth of current scholarship on the Asturian language. Moreover, they gesture to exciting avenues of potential research in the future.

As they are based on conference papers, the chapters comprising this volume are relatively concise. Although they share a common theme—the Asturian language—each chapter, save for the introductory first chapter, stands on its own, offering a diverse array of methodological approaches, objects of study, and historical timeframes. Taken together, the chapters represent a mosaic of scholarship on the Asturian language.

In Chapter 1, Avelino Corral Esteban, the volume's editor, offers a historical and political introduction to the Asturian language, situating it within the ongoing struggle for co-official recognition within the Principality of Asturias. He attributes its lack of official recognition to economic and political interests, since there is broad consensus among linguists that Asturian is, in fact, a language as opposed to a dialect, as some opposed to its recognition claim (p. 15). He then traces efforts to promote the language and its co-officiality and stresses the need to study, preserve, and promote the language before summarizing each of the following chapters.

Xosé Antón González Riaño analyzes, in Chapter 2, the presence of the Asturian language in the educational system of the Principality, an initiative that dates to the 1984–1985 school year and offers possible alternatives, taking into account current social demands and legal conditions. He notes that legally established guidelines for Asturian language instruction have not been followed, despite the clear social demand, especially among Asturian youth. The author provides detailed statistics about the current situation of Asturian pedagogy and suggests a number of proposals to strengthen Asturian education in the school system that could be enacted even under the current, non-official status of the language.

Chapter 3 addresses attitudes held by the scientific community and society at large toward minority languages. Ramón d'Andrés Díaz notes that the notion sustained by linguists that all languages are equally valuable has not caught on with the general public and members of the elite, where a stratification of languages still exists, and negatively impacts minoritized languages in particular, leading to their continued marginalization. He calls for linguists and educators to correct this misconception.

Chapter 4 is one of the several glotopolitical approaches in this volume that explores the inseparability of the Asturian language from politics (del Valle 2017: 17). Here, Carmen Ainoa Martínez Cuervo analyzes opposing political discourses on the co-officiality of Asturian by Ignacio Blanco, a politician of the far-right party Vox, and Adrián Barbón, the president of the Principality of Asturias and

secretary general of the *Federación Socialista Asturiana* (Asturian Socialist Federation). Martínez Cuervo analyzes the discursive binary represented by these discourses: Blanco's conception of a monolingual Spain under threat by an "imposed" minoritized language as opposed to Barbón's justification of Asturian linguistic rights as fundamentally democratic and European.

Covadonga Lamar Prieto explores another binary in Chapter 5, one established on Twitter between figurations of Asturian as an 'identitarian luxury' versus as an 'acquired constitutional right' (p. 60). Analyzing 2,801 tweets concerning the 16 October 2021 demonstration in favor of co-officiality for the Asturian language, she identifies three binomials representing attitudes opposed to or in favor of its co-officiality: rupture/identity; invention/normalization; and imposition/education. She finds that these Twitter discourses largely ignore the potential cognitive benefits of bilingualism and are largely established in a national, rather than specifically Asturian, framework.

In Chapter 6, Cristina Bleorțu and Miguel Cuevas-Alonso continue research (Bleorțu 2021) on linguistic attitudes among young residents of La Pola Siero concerning the use of Asturian and Castilian Spanish in the town. They find that the polled youth are not as concerned with the perceived relative prestige between Castilian Spanish and Asturian as are older residents from previous research, nor do the youth have much awareness of diglossia in their region.

Chapter 7 returns to Twitter, as Gonzalo Llamedo Pandiella analyzes the spread of linguistic prejudices on social media. The author identifies a repeated set of negative stereotypes and prejudices forwarded by those opposed to the officiality of Asturian, who undermine the language itself while accusing its supporters of doing so for their own financial benefit.

Isabel Álvarez Sancho analyzes the relationship between Asturian music and activism on Facebook in Chapter 8. The author examines the primary language used on public Facebook pages for musicians and bands, the relationship between the languages employed in their music and their posts, their number of followers, and connections between posts and activism. She finds a predominance of Asturian posts, with a correlation between artists who sing in Asturian or perform instrumental music and posting in that language, notes a rather limited reach of the most active posters, and concludes that activist content on the analyzed pages is rather reduced but tends to relate to the defense and visibility of Asturian.

Chapter 9 analyzes the use of Asturian in local media. Covadonga Martínez Sánchez notes the relative scarcity of Asturian in traditional regional media despite growing demand. Digital media in Asturias has worked to fill this gap, providing new platforms to promote the use of Asturian as a popular and cultural language. Digital activism has also succeeded in generating discourses defending the language.

In Chapter 10, Lourdes Guadalupe Montes Hernández conducts a sociolinguistic study of Asturian in the 16th and 17th centuries. She analyzes the social, economic, and political factors and processes that led to the hegemony of Castilian Spanish in Spain and the minoritization of Asturian, which survived mainly as an oral language in the Asturian region itself, and compellingly traces modern-day linguistic and social prejudices against Asturian to those processes.

Chapter 11 addresses the use of regional languages on the social media pages of Spanish football clubs, paying special attention to Asturian teams. Miriam Villazón Valbuena concludes that the use of Asturian on the social media pages of Asturian teams, in varying capacities, demonstrates the connection between regional languages and the sport. Further, she demonstrates how the use of regional languages by football clubs can create a sense of community beyond regional boundaries, extending to the digital world.

Matthew Stephen Stuckwisch analyzes Asturian identity in the novel *L'home les caparines* by Blanca Fernández in Chapter 12. Stuckwisch traces this *asturianidá* through references in the work to historical and present struggles in depopulated rural Asturian villages, characters who represent certain elements of Asturian society, and the *caparines*, or butterflies, which he metaphorically links to the Asturian language. The chapter explores how the novel, through seemingly quotidian elements, establishes a strong sense of Asturian identity.

In Chapter 13, Inaciu Galán y González offers a fascinating glimpse into the linguistic politics of the early years of the Franco dictatorship. Despite the apparent monolingualism under Franco, Asturian was still utilized, often in public acts and almost always in a folkloric capacity, as a symbol of regional diversity and traditions. Importantly, the language was reproduced as something of a curiosity and never as a political act or with the intention to preserve it, despite the fact that it was the primary language for the majority of Asturians, particularly among the popular classes. These early Francoist attitudes outlined by the author are key to understanding the language's future trajectory.

David Guardado Díez addresses the linguistic ideology of the well-known linguist and intellectual Ramón Menéndez Pidal in relation to Asturian in Chapter 14. The author analyzes an unpublished, undated letter by Menéndez Pidal, which he dates to the final years of the 19th century, criticizing the creation of an Asturian literary tradition, and expressing his desire that the language, after being thoroughly studied, be allowed to fade away. The *topoi* found in the letter, Guardado Díez affirms, follow the dominant linguistic ideology at the time, reflecting movements to establish Castilian Spanish as the dominant language in Spain and sideline projects to recuperate other regional languages.

In Chapter 15, Adrián Martínez Expósito details research being carried out by the Fernán-Coronas Project, begun in 2021, to recover, preserve, and study

the poetry of Padre Galo Antonio Fernández, known by the pseudonym Fernán-Coronas. The prolific output of Fernán-Coronas, one of the most important poets in the Asturian language, presents certain organizational and methodological challenges for this task. Therefore, the author recommends publishing individual, thematic collections of his poems, while also accounting for the poet's own internal structuring, to preserve this important component of Asturian literature.

Chapter 16 centers on the role of literature in the recovery of *patsuezu*, a variety of western Asturian spoken in southwest Asturias and northwest León. After delving into some of the characteristics of this dialect, María Méndez Arrais asserts that literature in *patsuezu* is key not only to reflecting the culture of the region but also to documenting and preserving the language itself.

In Chapter 7, Taresa Fernández Lorences analyzes verb periphrases in Asturian in contrast to Castilian Spanish. The author concludes that although there are similarities between verb periphrases in the two languages, Asturian maintains its own characteristics, lexicon, syntax, and semantics. Given the importance of this verb structure in Asturian, which rarely utilizes compound verb forms, the author's comparative analysis is particularly valuable.

Chapter 18 concerns research conducted by the FORTRATIB research group on forms of address across all languages of the Iberian Peninsula. In this chapter, Xavier Frías Conde details the specific forms of address in Asturian-Leonese, analyzed through an address tagging system developed by the research group. Utilizing this system, Frías Conde demonstrates that distinct paradigms of address are present within the Asturian-Leonese diasystem, including in Mirandese, which maintains the archaic T-V paradigm, in which V represents the courtesy form.

In a similar vein, Michał Belina traces the distinct evolution of Mirandese in Chapter 19, a variant of Asturleonese spoken in Portugal. The author describes similarities and differences among various Asturleonese linguistic modalities and then analyzes distinct characteristics of the Mirandese vowel system to trace this variant's unique historical evolution.

Michael Metzeltin, in the final chapter, summarizes the evolution of the Asturian Language through history. Drawing from his 2004 book on romance languages (Metzeltin 2004), he mirrors the three pillars of this edited volume, noting the distinctiveness of Asturian as compared to Castilian Spanish and other romance languages, the importance of the Asturian language to identity in the region, and stresses the need to preserve, protect, and utilize the language to ensure its future. Finally, he emphasizes the importance of the *Diccionariu Etimolóxicu de la Llingua Asturiana* (García Arias 2021), not only for the study of Asturian also but as an indispensable contribution to romance languages writ large.

The Asturian Language stands as a wide-ranging overview of contemporary scholarship on Asturleonese. However, the volume would benefit from a slight

reorganization to create more clearly delineated subsections based on common methodologies or objects of study, such as Asturian Literature, The Use of Asturian on Social Media, and so on. This would facilitate browsing the volume and could generate productive comparative readings by placing related chapters into more direct dialogue. Additionally, as noted previously, because the volume is based on conference papers, the chapters tend to be rather short; at times greater detail or more developed analysis would be appreciated. However, the choral nature of the volume is one of its greatest strengths: it not only brings together an impressive array of interdisciplinary contributions to Asturian sociolinguistics but also gestures toward exciting research to be completed. This will be particularly necessary in the ongoing campaign for co-officiality of the language, a crucial step to guarantee its use, protection, and survival into the future.

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***Translingualism, Translation and Caribbean Poetry: Mother Tongue Has Crossed the Ocean.* Hilda de Windt Ayoubi and Pieter C. Muysken (Eds.). (2022). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Pp. 316. ISBN: 9789463727440 (hbk), ISBN: 9789048552931 (ePDF).**

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This is a very special book in which several voices are raised, inspired by beautiful praise in the form of a poem highlighting the heart-felt idea of *Lenga di Mama*, “Mother tongue,” in Papiamentu. Even when a person has several mother tongues, as is the case of some Vaupes communities in the Amazon basin (Jackson 1983) or in other (polygyny) multilingual societies, this concept appeals to a most inner and deep part of ourselves that is linked to the tongue we were nurtured with from the womb.

Translingualism, translation and Caribbean poetry. Mother tongue has crossed the ocean. Lenga di Mama Krusa Laman is organized as follows: A brief note opens the book, entitled *How to navigate the book*, followed by Acknowledgments and a Preface translated into five languages, and closing with six so-called parts.

Part one includes a general Introduction on the value of translation and poetry to maintain and develop a mother tongue, bringing to the fore the example of Papiamentu and highlighting its history and actual sociolinguistic status, examining its origins, the development of a written script, and the production of texts, including the long tradition of translation into this tongue (such as the translations of Kahlil Gibran’s poems and the translations that de Windt herself substantially

contributed to that have trespassed language barriers). The importance of incorporating Papiamentu into the educational system and developing a curriculum in Papiamentu together with Papiamentu linguistics, music, and poetry as ways of resisting language endangerment is discussed in this part too. All of this and the following succinct yet very useful information on language diversity and language politics, educational (Creole) linguistics, sociolinguistics, translation studies, and so on make this book very appealing for students and specialists alike, allowing the book to be used for several purposes, including inspiring research or teaching basic courses on language diversity.

Part two, in turn, introduces the Creole languages, followed by translations of the poem into Kwèyól (Antillean Creole of Gaudeloupe), Matnik (Martinican Creole), Sranantongo (Creole of Surinam), Kriol de Sònsent (Cape Verdean of Sao Vicente), Morisien (Mauritian Creole), Kréol Rénioné (Reunion Creole), and Hawaiian Pidgin. In line with this structure, which includes descriptions of the language(s) plus their respective translations, and continued as the main core of the book, this part also includes African, Asian, Amerindian, constructed, Germanic, Romance, Indo-European, and other European tongues, closing with Semitic languages and all followed by translations of the *Lenga di Mama*.

This book also offers a bonus of de Windt's other translated poems at the end of the book: *E 'papia' di Papiamentu*, "Papiamentu speech," *Papiamentu pa Semper*, "Papiamentu forever," and *Riba Ala di Lenga di Mama* "On the wings of mother tongue" (parts 3, 4, and 5), together with a final Commentary titled Translation, Language Endangerment and Revitalization by Pieter Muysken highlighting the connection between translation and the emergent field of language revitalization in linguistics. All of this makes this book a highly complete text on different facets of the study of and interventions on language diversity in general and specifically focusing on Creole languages, linguistics, poetry, and translation, and even language revitalization, which are seldomly all included in a single text.

The front cover features an illustration of the 'lantern of knowledge' by Hilda de Windt, who is a Papiamentu poetess, translator, and researcher. The poem *Lenga di Mama*, as the *leitmotiv* of the book, includes translations into over 50 languages from across the world, representing the stunning diversity of the world's languages and providing brief yet very informative data on, for instance, the structure and history of many different languages and their current sociolinguistic status. Therefore, this fabulous and delightful book encompasses a wealth of linguistic diversity in several respects. It also highlights the value of the arts—especially poetry—as a very powerful method to reclaim and vindicate minoritized languages, with Caribbean poetry, in particular Papiamentu and Creole linguistics, an outstanding illustration of the growth and development of a mother tongue in line with affirmation of the Creole identity.

Papiamentu has a highly mixed status that combines and incorporates colonial languages into its repertoire, e.g., Spanish, Dutch, and more recently, English, even though it is thought of as originally being developed from Portuguese, Spanish, and African languages. Papiamentu is also an egregious example of “linguistic collaboration,” to borrow an Euskera approach (popular in sorority initiatives of Euskadi’s organizations, such as the famous Garabide, toward several minoritized languages of the world¹) recalling the Papiamentu proverb and also applied to the translation quest, *Un man ta laba otro, tur dus ta bira linpi* “two hands wash each other to become clean.” This reminds us of the outstanding role of collaboration across several endeavors (e.g., translation and revitalization). In Papiamentu this is expressed in proverbs and in general in verbal art, highlighting the power of oral traditions as well as popular music and poetry for maintaining and developing Creole languages and linguistics, and endangered languages in general. Therefore, Creole languages, as a function of the agency of their speakers, are egregious illustrations of linguistic and cultural resilience, which is clearly expressed in this book. Just think, for instance, about how colonial languages have been re-grammaticized as the so-called lexifier languages—the African linguistic diaspora is resonant in all of them. Since the 1970s, the formerly low social prestige that Creoles have been submitted to has steadily been reversed, gaining visibility through the arts—outstandingly literature. During these processes, Creole linguistics has also played a key role that has looked to overcome the denigrating “Patois” ideologies of linguistic inferiority. Today we know that all of these Caribbean Creoles have at least covert prestige (cf. Labov 1966) and that uttering them are in fact acts of vindication of social “new” identities, which at the same time are nurtured by ancestral, mostly African (e.g., Bantu and Kwa), languages.

Thus, the human creativity and agency that has allowed the emergence of new languages and the revival, survival, continuity, and flourishing of mother tongues is at stake in this book. In this respect, Creoles show how human capacity strives and survives, which allows us to speak of sociolinguistic resilience even in extremely oppressive circumstances, such as slavery, as an utmost expression of human exploitation. Creoles, one of the research passions of Pieter Muysken, coauthor and coeditor of the book, and to whom the book is dedicated postmortem after his unexpected swift departure, are seldom referred to as what they are: outstanding examples of the possibility of regaining and recreating linguistic diversity, developing and even stabilizing a mother tongue to all its heights, including the public and the private sphere, as is the case with Papiamentu in Curaçao, de Windt’s homeland.

This book also deals with other historically marginalized and endangered languages, together with major languages, including English, briefly emphasizing key features of their history and actual configuration with key and very

valuable information. For instance, we learn that English is a translinguistic outcome of centuries of extensive contact with several other languages, such as French, from which it has taken up over 40% of its lexicon, therefore differentiating its linguistic identity from other Germanic languages, which are also included in the book (e.g., German, Dutch, and other lesser known languages, such as Frisian).

It is thus very stimulating to encounter a kaleidoscope of voices from all over the world in the form of both professional and more spontaneous translators of the poem *Lenga di Mama*, each followed by sharp personal and at times highly moving emotional assessments linked to the mother tongue as our first and ultimate language, together with descriptions of the challenges as well as opportunities faced by poem translations, bridging gaps from an astonishing diversity of languages and cultures.

Included in the book are often highly stigmatized varieties of languages that constitute fascinating mirrors to understand linguistic amalgams that have been occurring for a long time, including regional varieties of national languages (e.g., Spanish, English, and French), which in their long-standing contact history with indigenous languages have produced translinguistic varieties of colonial languages. Take, for instance, the case of Andean, Yucatec, or Mexican Spanish, which constantly resonate their Kechwa or Kichwa, Yucatec Maya, or Nahuatl origins, respectively.

Alongside useful maps locating all of the languages included in the book, interesting facts of several languages, such as Irish being the third oldest literature in the world, together with its awakening status, are discussed. Other selected European languages encompass discussions on English, Dutch, German, Frisian, Brabants, and Swiss German, inviting us to reflect on their brotherhood and linking stable and even flourishing languages with endangered, threatened languages in order to examine their diverse, constantly changing status, which at times strives for revitalization, revival, or language reclamation. This is a topic where the chapter by Pieter Muysken, included to close the book, provides examples of the role of Waynos (a popular musical genre in the Andes) and multilingual raps in Berber communities and calypsos for Trinidad as outstanding opportunities to empower marginalized communities and their languages. This is a very important contribution, perhaps one of the last pieces that Pieter Muysken wrote in his prolific life as a linguist and, as Hilda writes in her In Memoriam, “a bridge builder.” Bringing to the fore the case of Uchumantaqu (Uru) revitalization, which is considered an almost extinct language in the Bolivian Lake Titicaca region, Muysken reminds us how language endangerment is one of the outmost important cultural concerns of our times that is resonant in many, if not all, parts of the world. The author reminds us of key reflections in this contribution, including how defining language entails building

a specific ingroup identity in the face of (often extreme) processes of linguistic restructuring in terms of the hegemonic tongue. Uru was a case in point when it was completely immersed in Aymara, a powerful neighboring language, which posed a series of dilemmas and paradoxes in the life cycle of a dormant language, such as the role of purism to inhibit or, on the contrary, potentiate its use and revitalization.

Another wide range of topics that will hopefully inspire young researchers and students to read this book can be called upon by the series of questions posed by the book; e.g., Did you know that Greek is the language of Cyprus and that it is written in its old, original alphabet? That the Cyrillic alphabet was invented in Bulgaria? This, together with Sanskrit and Farsi (Persian) is one of the oldest documented languages of the world, dating back between 6000 and 7000 thousand years ago, of Indo-European genetic affiliation yet written in the Arabic script? Did you know that Farsi was also used in India? That Armenian is also Indo-European, that it is written in the Arabic script, and is also related to Greek? That Russian has had six Nobel prizes? That Hindi is the standard form of Hindustani and the third most populous language of the world, also spoken in Surinam, stemming from the colloquial Hindi variety which is the language of many people of Indian descent there and mixed with Sranan and Dutch, called Hamaar Bhaasa or Sarnami?

Several other questions of interest to a wide audience are raised and paths for their comprehension can be found in this polyvocal book, such as how the Semitic languages configured their actual status, such as Arab and Hebrew. We learn that Arab is a very strong language with specific traits, such as having a very old written and religious tradition dating back to the 4th century. It is written almost exclusively using consonants with vowels immersed or submersed in them. The *Qūr'an* has provided a powerful religious sense of belonging and unity to the Arab language and the world, and is responsible for the famous concept of diglossia (Ferguson, 1956), a sociolinguistic structure that has prevailed for many centuries in which the *Qūr'an* has reigned as the superimposed variety alongside the development of a High formal variety versus a Low, and an informal version, the latter linked to the mother tongue and comprising several dialectal varieties across the Middle East. In contrast, other lesser known Semitic and at times extremely minoritized languages are also included in this book, such as Surat and Turoyo-neo-Aramaic or Assyrian, which are losing ground as many speakers were forced into exile.

This brings us to peaceful linguistics. Ultimately, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, despite their sociopolitical struggles, share several traits that are encapsulated in their languages, a fact that could work as a path for reconciliation where mother tongues are hopefully conceived as a pacifying or at least unifying force.

Not Lost but Found in Translation

Conventional methods of conceiving and living translation have often overstated its difficult and often impossible character alongside undermining its importance. This book brings fresh air to the issue in line with developments in critical translation theory (see, e.g., Berman, 1995). This book also includes traversing the alphabet into Greek and Hindi scripts—so-called transliterations—which can also be thought of as another form of “translation.”

Translation is conceived here as a political weapon to undermine, for instance, the power of English, as in the Irish context as Mark Ó Fionnáin states, together with creating Irish works from scratch. Along these lines, the issue of translating poetry is also raised, overcoming the *traduttore traditore* dictum. On the contrary, translation is not conceived as a problem but rather a resource, an opportunity to bring different voices together in a collaborative, creative manner. Not afraid of translation, poetic license embraces the challenge of recreating a poem and recovering the deep nuances of specific languages, such as when the Greek translator Cleo Paraquevoupoulou used “etheries” to translate the original “delicate” in Papiamento, or recovering other semiotic jewels such as the Russian phraseology “to soak mother’s milk,” used to convey the idea of the mother tongue spoon utilized in the original *Lenga di Mama*. As Pieter Muysken suggests, we are not lost, but found, in translation, reaching a win-win situation in which translation involves gaining “reflection, understanding and enrichment of texts.”

Therefore, translation can bring together unity in diversity, the utopia of a two-way interculturality that opens the possibility of finding culturally and linguistically sensitive relevant equivalences even when they stray from the original literal meaning, as received orthodox translation would reduce the issue to. On the contrary, translation as a model of emancipation and dialogue, not of subordination, is what this book evokes, bringing together this collaborative endeavor as a series of opportunities to embrace each other’s tongue as one while at the same time celebrating our differences and allowing one to view other people’s mother tongue from our own and vice versa.

This book also reminds us that we need to reckon with the persistence of language, a metaphor appealing to the resilience of speaker communities, as Pieter Muysken recalls while reviewing several cases. This is highlighted by *Euskera* (Basque), which not only survived in spite of too easily been considered extinct in the 19th century, but has even been developed into *Euskara Batua*, its standard version, hoping to become a 1 million language community in the 21st century. This inspires *euskaltzale*, “linguistic militants,” be it via translating or creating poems, or in general materializing tangible artistic products, conceiving poetry and translation as cultural and political actions in favor of linguistic and cultural diversity.

General Evaluation

Although the editors of this book recognized that not all linguistic families were represented in their work (Australian languages are absent, for example), we feel this would be an impossible task for a single text. However, the book has an almost encyclopedic, introductory character to a very interesting portion of the world's languages with a very engaging approach of interest to several audiences, combining poetry with several reflections on translation and sociolinguistic issues of interest. Therefore, this book will appeal to both poets, beginners and advanced students, translators, language activists, creolists, and interested researchers on a wide range of topics dealing with translinguistic diversity. This book also appeals to a general audience as it combines a wealth of basic information on a stunning diversity of languages, together with specific issues such as the power of translation and poetry to vindicate and revitalize endangered languages.

Putting together pieces of art in the form of delightful poems in a lesser known language—Papiamentu—and striving for stabilization and development, as well as fine pieces of their translation not limited to the main *Lenga di Mama leitmotiv*, are ways of bringing all of us together. Alongside the excellent analytic, academic sketches on several issues in many different world languages, ranging from structural, formal descriptive traits of the languages themselves (such as the wealth of their sound systems and scripts), and their history, to their demographic, political, and sociolinguistic status, we are able to celebrate the diversity of human kind, especially the seas of linguistic possibilities flowing into a single ocean to achieve the goal of *Lenga di Mama a Krusa Laman*, “Mother tongue has crossed the ocean.”

Note

1. <https://www.garabide.eus/euskara/proiektuak/hizkuntza-indigenak-ama-lurra-zaintzen>

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***Language, Migration and Multilingualism in the Age of Digital Humanities.* Ignacio Andrés Soria, Sandra Issel-Dombert and Laura Morgenthaler García (Eds.). 2022. Berlin and Boston: Mouton de Gruyter. Pp. 272. ISBN: 9783110745962 (pbk), ISBN: 9783110746181 (epub), ISBN: 9783110746082 (ePDF)**

Reviewed by Kira Molina

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The global emergence of mobile media has led to a profound change in mobility and communication alike. In the spirit of interdisciplinarity, the need for innovative research focus and methods has become clear, especially in terms of the interplay among factors such as mobility, migration, and multilingualism. This is because these social processes, in particular, are changing in myriad ways due to the contemporary framework of social interaction and engagement.

To address these lacunae, several new and emergent research fields have begun investigating the changes that have arisen as a result of the growth of mobile media in the context of mobility and communication. This trend has given rise to interdisciplinary research fields such as *digital communication studies* and *digital migration studies*. Although these fields have been considered part of sociolinguistic studies for several years, the digital humanities have now emerged as a current and relatively new discipline at the intersection of the humanities and computer science insofar as they blend the working methods and approaches of the two disciplines (cf. Vinck, 2018: 7–10).

The aim of this new so-called *digital humanities* research is to analyze current social problems by employing interdisciplinary methods and to open new vectors of inquiry that would not have been possible with traditional research approaches deployed in the humanities. The use of computer-aided analysis processes, for example, now offers the opportunity to explore complex data structures and generate potential new knowledge through innovative and technologically supported approaches.

In their volume “Language, migration and multilingualism in the age of digital humanities,” published in August 2023, Ignacio Andrés Soria, Sandra Issel-Dombert, and Laura Morgenthaler García have made a fruitful and thought-provoking contribution to the academic discourses surrounding contemporary issues in this new age of digital humanities. Their volume provides inspiration for (Romance) linguistics in the context of migration and heteroglossic practices, which often encounter differentiated language ideologies in Western societies.

The editors’ aim is to critically reflect on both the benefits and limitations of digitalization in different areas and to the superdiverse contexts of the Spanish-speaking world, while simultaneously examining the interface among digitalization, multilingualism, language, and migration (pp. 1–2).

To this end, the volume is divided into three parts, each focusing on distinct issue areas. Containing 11 case studies, which are divided into 3 thematic sections, current research questions and trends are analyzed. With the aid of methodologically distinct studies, alongside theoretical foundations and recent empirical data, a broad cross-section of innovative approaches is outlined, which renders the effects of digitalization on the fields of multilingualism research and migration linguistics more visible. Employing theoretical and methodological perspectives in the case studies, an attempt is made to enable a more sophisticated understanding of the complex interplay that exists between language and digitalization. This serves to make the effects of digital change in the humanities—especially in the Spanish-speaking world—more apparent and more comprehensible (pp. 1–2).

The editors pay particular attention to the fundamental observation that digital spaces play a key role in this space, particularly in the context of migration and multilingualism. The fact that “globally, the advent of mobile media has led to a profound transformation of mobility and communication” is naturally common to all of the case studies (p. 1).

The preface introduces the case studies, which is likewise divided into three parts: (1) *Starting Point* (pp. 1–2); (2) *Digitalization, Transformations, and Emerging Disciplines* (pp. 2–4); and (3) *Multilingualism and Migration Linguistics in the Era of Digital Humanities: Traditions and Trends* (pp. 4–7). The introductory words

in the Chapter 1 Starting Point comprise the primary objective of the work and thus, as it were, the motivations underpinning the volume, which seek “to provide new, in-depth insights into both the added value as well as the limitations of digitalization” (p. 1).

In Chapter 2, the editors outline a broad overview of the fundamental changes resulting from digitalization. Profound structural, material, and ontological changes that result “from the increasingly frequent human-computer-interactions and the intensity with which digital discourses are embodied and digital language practices performed” are herein highlighted (p. 2). For the editors, the changing and central questions for linguistics that naturally result from these shifts characterize the “interface” work, which has already begun and remains in progress.

The foreword chapter, *Multilingualism and Migration Linguistics in the Era of Digital Humanities: Traditions and Trends* focuses on the explanation of existing traditions and trends in multilingualism research and migration linguistics, in addition to a brief introduction to the following case studies. The chapter postulates the enrichment of linguistic research through current methodological approaches in the age of digital humanities (cf. Meier-Vieracker, 2022).

The following thematically subdivided sections have a title that refers to the thematic orientation of the included studies: Section 1: “Language Repertoires, Translingual Practices, and Indexicality,” contains a total of six contributions. This section presents recent case studies that emphasize how multilingual repertoires and translingual practices are related to indexicality.

The first study is by Gabriela Prego Vázquez and is entitled “A TranslinguisTIC Safe Space” (pp. 11–30). Prego Vázquez focuses on the use of multilingual repertoires in digital communication. As part of the study, she analyzes a WhatsApp group chat of young Moroccan migrants living in Galicia. Her analysis shows that the digital space functions as a safe space for the linguistic socialization of students among their peers and serves to develop translinguistic creativity. From this, she concludes that communicative practices indicate both new meanings and new language patterns.

The second case study by Maria Sabaté-Dalmau entitled “Migrants ICT-Mediated Communication Strategies and Subversive Multilingual Practices” (pp. 31–50) examines the multilingual practices and ICT-mediated communication strategies of a total of 20 unemployed migrants in a call shop in Barcelona. The aim of this study is a kind of sociolinguistic (self-)integration process in the digital age, whereby the data on which this study is based originates from the years 2007 to 2009 and is therefore (in terms of the overall topicality of the data in the volume) already comparatively old. However, the results of the analysis indicate

that the migrants analyzed routinely exhibit subversive multilingual practices that fundamentally question monolingual normativity. Due to the data utilized in this study, a contrast with recently collected data would be interesting.

With reference to the aim of the volume “to critically reflect on both the benefits and the limits of digitalization in different areas and superdiverse contexts of the Spanish-speaking world” (p. 2), the study by Andrea Chagas entitled “Migration and Linguistic Repertoire” (pp. 51–77) uses the example of the concept of supervernacularity to show the limits of this on a sociolinguistic level. Using the example of the YouTube channel of Guineo-Ecuadorian Monanga Bueneke, she attempts to close the research gap between studies on varieties of Spanish and Guineo-Ecuadorian and to help this variety of Spanish gain more recognition within the pluricentric Hispanic discourse. Chagas concludes her contribution with the observation that superdiversity, and thus linguistic diversity, was and continues to be the norm in most countries and, above all, remains the norm in all former colonized countries. Her statement that sociolinguistics can finally begin to view variation as normality and no longer as deviation with the help of new paradigms is thus a very fundamental one that should be viewed independently of existing discussions about superdiversity (cf. Vertovec, 2007; Pavlenko, 2018; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) and creates the basic prerequisites for further important analyses and perspectives.

With the title “Gltopolitical Interventions and Virtuality in Spanish Language Teaching for Senegalese Immigrants during the Pandemic (Buenos Aires, 2020–2021),” Nélica Murguía Cruz refers in the fourth case study (pp. 79–98) to a sociolinguistic characterization of Senegalese migration in Buenos Aires, particularly taking its transnationality into consideration and referring to specific gltopolitical strategies of this community. In doing so, she highlights their relationship to information and communication technologies (TIC), characterizes Spanish courses as gltopolitical interventions, and analyzes their context of origin as well as their relationship or contribution to “popular education.”

The effects that the connection between digital information and communication technologies and global crises can have been shown in the case study “No Seas Covidiota. Processes of Positioning and Identification through a Neologism on Twitter” by Franziska Kailich (pp. 99–127). As an ideal space for the formation and expression of identities and, as it were, a communication space without geographic boundaries, Kailich discusses selected results of a study conducted in March 2020 on the neologism *covidiota*, which was derived from the English *covidiot* and emerged during the pandemic. In doing so, she not only looks at the use of the term among Spanish-speaking Twitter users, but also identifies forms of positioning and identity expression in connection with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis.

In the reviewer's opinion, this study provides an interesting example of how the scope and potential for change caused by global crises can also lead to new or changed positioning processes in linguistic terms (cf. Gallego Cuiñas, 2022).

The study "Using Geolocated Tweets for Probing Language Geography and Migration" (pp. 129–138) by Olga Kellert, which takes a closer look at geolocated tweets in order to examine language geography and migration, also shows that platforms such as Twitter produce interesting results in the context of digital studies. The case study discusses the distribution of Spanish-language tweets in the world as a whole and the distribution of Spanish-language tweets specifically in New York City. The results point to the suitability of the Twitter platform as an interesting and valid data source for analyzing linguistic geography and migration. At the same time, Kellert also points out the limitations of such investigations, which could be remedied by future studies.

Section 2, *Language and Identity Construction*, contains a total of two case studies. This makes it the shortest section of the volume. In accordance with the title of Section 2, Enrique Pato's study "'New' Technologies and 'New' Identity Formation" (pp. 141–168) deals with the characteristics of identity formation among Hispanic migrants in the city of Montreal, Canada, and develops various fundamental and equally new theoretical questions on identity and group membership. According to Pato, Hispanophone migrants find themselves in a situation of diglossia. However, bilingualism or multilingualism is individualized, and diglossia can be located spatially (in relation to the territory). Pato emphasises that one and the same individual can live and act in several nonexclusive spaces at the same time, which is why "identity" should therefore not be understood as a fixed, but rather a dynamic phenomenon.

The study by Jannis Harjus entitled "Virtual Speaker Design—Phonographic Uses of Andalusian Variables in Migration Contexts" (pp. 169–186) can also be situated in this third-wave context of sociolinguistic observation. Harjus examines the speaker design of Andalusian speakers in the diaspora, focusing on chat conversations. The study explicitly highlights how middle-aged speakers of Cordovan and Jerez origin who have a university education and live outside Andalusia and do not actually tend to use certain phonetic features of the Spanish spoken in Andalusia (e.g., *jejeo* or *rotacismo*) nevertheless graphically represent these variables in communicative situations via the written medium of WhatsApp. Harjus concludes that this appears to be a communicative strategy for ironizing, but above all for creating a linguistic identity in migration situations. Harjus also points to a division of the communicative space in Andalusia, which can be seen in a stronger convergence of the Eastern Andalusian varieties with the European Spanish norm as well as in a (hyper)dialectalism that is very present in the

Western Andalusian group. The findings from the third wave of sociolinguistics studies, which conceptualized speakers as representatives of social categories and attempted to investigate fundamental correlations between speaker groups and linguistic variation, are clearly evident here. These insights are correlated to how social categories are constructed by speakers because in the interpretation of third-wave studies, they are not regarded as representatives of the latter, but are themselves constructors of them (cf. Eckert, 2012: 97–98).

Individual language and identity negotiations, to which Harjus refers here, give rise to interesting new and innovative (language) dynamics that clearly demonstrate the relevance of digital spaces and their investigation.

Section 3, *Digital Discourses and Glotopolitical Perspectives*, contains a total of three case studies: The first study is by Alba Polo-Artal and is entitled “Gender and Racial Orders in Vox’s Nativist Discourses” (pp. 189–218). This study focuses on the role that race and gender play in the discourse of the political party Vox. Polo-Artal’s aim is to show the role that the racialization of sexism plays in justifying security and anti-immigration discourses. With her interdisciplinary analysis of tweets from 2020 to 2021 on Vox’s official Twitter channel, Polo-Artal shows how the mechanism of masculinity and femininity is active in the polarized construction of the in-group and ex-group used to justify nativism, anti-feminism and a defence of party-specific equality. The second study by Francisco José Sánchez García (pp. 219–234) “Spaniards First—Notes on Hate Speech Towards Migrants on Twitter” analyzes racist hate comments on the basis of a corpus of responses to the official account of the Vox party on the microblogging network.

The case study “Constructing a Crisis by Constructing a Migratory Threat” by Svenja Dufferain-Ottmann (pp. 235–264) concludes the thematic third part by analyzing both explicit and implicit antimigration thought patterns in the COVID-19 discourse on the Twitter channel of the right-wing populist party Vox. In her study, Dufferain-Ottmann analyzes a populist discourse that links the COVID-19 pandemic with migration. The results of her study show populist discursive logics for creating a social dichotomization and thus illustrate constructivist linguistic possibilities for mobilizing crisis situations (cf. Balkan & Kutlu Tonak, 2022).

In terms of methodology, the studies are gratifyingly diverse and show a wide variety of successful and current research. In this way, not only different approaches, but above all interesting new research questions are dealt with or raised. The density of content and length of the individual case studies convey significant insights for the readership and outline comprehensible frames of reference, but at the same time are not overly extensive. Because of the intuitive division of content into thematic *sections*, it is also easy to consult the assigned case studies individually.

This volume presents the case studies, which are highly significant in terms of both methodology and content, as insightful and unique context, thus providing approaches to critically reflect on the enrichment and, as it were, the limits of digitalization in various areas and super-diverse contexts of the Spanish-speaking world.

At the same time, the intended thematic focus is at the forefront, namely, the examination of digitalization, multilingualism, and migration. In this way, it is indeed possible—as stated in the foreword—to provide “new in-depth insights into both the added value and the limits of digitalisation” (Soria et al., 2023: 1).

The only real point of criticism concerns a brief categorization of the division of the individual sections: these are not equally represented thematically and thus suggest a weighting of possible factors. To make it clear that the aim here is rather to place the case studies in a closer thematic context, a short passage in the preface would have been desirable, which would have given the reader information and further clarification about this categorization. In the reviewer's view, this would have further justified the division and corresponding categorization of the studies.

From the reviewer's point of view, it should also be briefly noted—particularly regarding a possible second edition—that 12 case studies are announced in the foreword (p. 2), but the readership can only expect a total of 11 studies. A correction should be made here for a subsequent edition of this volume in order to be able to refer to the number of case studies congruently in the foreword.

An additional small suggestion concerns the final structure of the volume because in this reviewer's opinion the volume ends rather abruptly with the conclusion (p. 261) and the references (p. 264) of the last case study, as this is followed only by the index (from p. 265). In the reviewer's opinion, the reader misses a short conclusion after the last case study. Such a conclusion would make it possible, after consulting the case studies, to lead the reader to a brief joint outlook in which, for example, it could be explained that the case studies are a selection of current studies whose perspectives can continue to enrich (Romance) linguistics in the future. This would make it possible to name desiderata or further questions arising from the case studies in a short passage and to point out the need for and avenues into further research.

However, these points of criticism in no way detract from the high substantive value of the anthology, which explores numerous interesting and high-quality case studies that utilize current data. It is therefore desirable that the volume receives a broad reception and extensive recognition, which could continue the work toward the stated aim of the work, namely “to critically reflect on both the benefits and the limits of digitalization in various areas and super-diverse contexts of the Spanish-speaking world,” being pursued in the future and supported by future studies.

In the reviewer's opinion, the volume thus serves as a successful visualization of what current digital description spaces allow, makes an important contribution to current sociolinguistic research and some of the desiderata already mentioned in the literature (cf. Patzelt, 2018: 155–160), and is thus recommended to those who want to gain an overview of current theoretical and methodological topics, questions, and approaches in the age of digital humanities.

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***The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publication.* Pejman Habibie and Anna Kristina Hultgren (Eds.). (2022). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 267. ISBN: 9783031065187 (hbk), ISBN: 9783031065217 (eBook)**

Reviewed by Tania Rahman

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Gatekeeping in academic publishing is an ever-intriguing process for filtering out new knowledge in academia. Focusing mostly on memoirs and (auto-)biographies of editors and publishers in the American publishing industry (Sato, 2012), the literature on the roles and responsibilities of publishers and editors as gatekeepers of the scholarly knowledge-building process has been mostly North-centric, emphasizing the mainstream publishing dynamics while lacking the voices of peripheral gatekeepers located in other parts of the global publishing scenario. The volume under review edited by Pejman Habibie and Anna Kristina Hultgren is a timely attempt to address this gap in research.

The book starts with Chapter 1 by Ken Hyland who introduces the concept of gatekeeping, answers the question of whether reviewers are merely “gatekeepers” or “facilitators” of academic publishing, and quite lucidly writes on what necessitates the peer review process in scholarly publishing and why it is not so rewarding for reviewers at times.

In Chapter 2, “Different Faces of Gatekeeping and Gatekeepers,” Pejman Habibie and Anna Kristina Hultgren introduce the volume by highlighting the various facets of gatekeeping in the scholarly publishing industry and discuss the contents and significance of each of the three approaches, “discursive,” “political,” and “humanist” perspectives. The volume is divided into three parts comprising

the personal narratives and autoethnographic accounts of editors and peer reviewers across the globe in 11 chapters delving into the complex and often enigmatic world of academic publishing. The chapters in the volume attempt to connect the dots between the etic and emic approaches to the “study of the enterprise of knowledge construction, adjudication, and circulation” (p. 17). The chapter serves as a well-knit introduction to not just theoretical but also pragmatic interpretations of what academic gatekeepers do and how they do it in academic publishing.

Part I of the volume, entitled “Identities, Positions, and Beliefs,” contains four chapters that are interconnected by means of the authors’ autoethnographic reflections on socialization into the gatekeeping discourse community as well as collaboration between the novice and the experienced gatekeepers and support that scaffold the academic growth of the gatekeepers. The first part starts off with Chapter 3 with the autoethnographic account of one of the volume editors, Pejman Habibie, who reflects on his personal growth as a reviewer and co-editor of the *Journal of English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP)*. Based on Wall’s (2016) autoethnographic model, In an attempt to link social constructionist notions of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and academic identity trajectory (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011), Habibie showed how resilient personal initiatives, collaborative mentoring, and a supportive sociocultural environment of an academic context shaped his academic trajectory, constructed his reviewer identity, and scaffolded his transition and socialization into editorial practice. Using a similar self-reflective autoethnographic lens, Rosa M. Manchón in Chapter 4 also portrays the personal, interpersonal, and professional aspects of her growth and identity development from a novice Outer Circle scholar to an Inner Circle gatekeeper of research and scholarly publications at both local and global academic contexts. In a similar attempt to discuss the sociocultural contexts and interactions scaffolding a peer reviewer’s socialization into the academic gatekeeping community, in Chapter 5, Guillaume Gentil delves into controversial challenges of the peer review genre such as linguistic injustice in the production and dissemination of knowledge in the present English-dominant knowledge economy and examines his journey as a scholar with varying degrees of linguistic proficiency, self-confidence, and anxieties in English and French. In Chapter 6, Peter de Costa, with a positive outlook, also underscores the value of collaboration between novice and seasoned scholars in the academic growth of gatekeepers in academia. In the chapter, de Costa enumerates his scholarly development trajectory from a book and journal manuscript reviewer to an editor of a high-impact scholarly journal in *Applied Linguistics* and emphasizes scholarly support by established scholars to mentor emergent and novice academics to develop as gatekeepers educated in gatekeeping literacies.

In the second part of the volume, “Discourses, Norms, Values,” four chapters cover not only more internalized and close accounts of the authors’ personal involvement in the peer review genre discourse through the gatekeepers’ self-analyses and reflections on their own rhetorical and discursive choices, preferences, and practices in Chapters 7 and 9 but also their critiques on the external sociopolitical norms, values, and discourses shaping their gatekeeping responsibilities in Chapters 8 and 10. While employing different analytical frameworks as applied by Maria Kuteeva who uses Blommaert’s (2007) concepts of orders of indexicality and polycentricity and Du Bois’ (2007) stance triangle, and Ling Shi who applies Swales’ move analysis in Chapters 7 and 9, both Kuteeva and Shi analyze the review report genre by examining and reflecting on their own corpuses of peer review reports submitted to 15 and 14 academic journals, respectively. Whereas Maria Kuteeva reports her self-reflection on how a reviewer mediates between the author and the journal to maintain as well as challenge the control of academic journals by detecting stance act variations in interactions among the reviewer, the author, the editor, and the journal readership, Ling Shi underscores the humanist aspect of the gatekeeping discourse and the review report genre by examining the rhetorical structure of the recommendation and specific evaluation commentary sections of her review reports. In his autoethnographic and field-rhetoric interpretation of a journal editor in a Hungarian academic context, Márton Demeter portrays the gaps between mainstream and peripheral academic publishing norms, discourses, and structures that affect his auditorial position and responsibilities situated in an Eastern European academic scenario and calls for a more inclusive and diverse knowledge production and dissemination industry. Through a critical autoethnographic lens from her observations as an author and auditor in the present-day academic publishing industry in the last chapter of this part, Anna Kristina Hultgren, the second editor of the volume, very candidly criticizes the neoliberalist publishing trends often turning inhuman to scholars by endangering their well-being and intensifying inequalities globally. Hultgren identifies the problems as situated inside the publishing process and calls for a total reformation of the academic publishing process to ensure social justice and transformation of the world of publishing by eradicating inequality globally.

The third part of the book, “Roles, Relationships, Challenges,” has four chapters that cover gatekeeping responsibilities and challenges. This part starts with the experiential autoethnographic account of Carmen Sancho Guinda in Chapter 11, who, based on the Positioning and Decision theories, shows not only how trust and risk factors shape and reshape her roles as a peer reviewer by challenging her in carrying out her gatekeeping responsibilities but also how she deals with the risk situations. The theme of mediation recurs in this part of the volume with a different treatment in Chapter 12, in which Sally Burgess discusses the affective side

of authors' responses to mediation in reviewing the book chapter genre. Based on the analysis of a sample of narrative accounts of both harmonious and contentious mediation experiences, Burgess shows how face threats in the mediation between the authors and the gatekeepers ensue and how such threats can be minimized. Chapter 13 emphasizes on the journal editor playing a crucial role in the overall peer review system. The author, John Edwards, as an expert journal editor, shares his personal experience and explains some crucial criteria that academic journal editors as the auditors of scholarly publishing bear in mind in deciding on the acceptance or rejection of submissions as well as some of the common problems that occur in the rejection of manuscripts submitted to academic journals. The final part ends with Chapter 14, which is co-authored by two Iranian gatekeepers from the Middle East, Karim Sadeghi and Farah Ghaderi, who share their experiences about initiating and co-editing the *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research* in the academic context of Iran. In the autoethnographic narrative, they draw another differential portrait of the role and position of the journal editor in a peripheral academic context compared to that in a mainstream one. They explain the "other responsibilities" that this position in a peripheral context of academic publishing requires besides conducting the peer review process and the "challenges" that the auditors in this peripheral context of knowledge construction have to face for the commencement and foundation of a journal as well as administering the gatekeeping process.

The chapters in the volume quite efficiently achieve the book's purpose of covering the three "faces" or directions in ERPP and contribute to addressing the gaps in research on these three dimensions in this area of Applied Linguistics. The individual voices in each of the chapters present unique personal sketches as well as contain panoramic views of universal gatekeeping issues in scholarly publication. As well as covering introspective chapters on the formal and rhetorical side of the peer review genre discourse, the book also sheds light on the personal growth of editors and peer reviewers as auditors through socializing in the complex world of gatekeeping which reveals the "humanist face" (p. 14) and tears open the not so charming "political" face of gatekeeping in the backdrop of the current consumerist trend in scholarly publishing around the globe. The internalized engagement of the authors as auditors become alive in the book alongside the depiction of several universal humane issues in the scholarly publishing world such as trust and risk in publishing between authors and editors in Chapter 11, the harmonious and contentious experiences of face threats between the authors and the gatekeepers in mediation in editing and peer review in Chapter 12 and controversial issues such as linguistic hierarchies in the dichotomous mainstream-peripheral worlds of scholarly publishing in Chapter 8. I was particularly moved by Anna Kiristina Hultgren's chapter entitled "Certifying Knowledge Under Neoliberalism: Global

Inequality and Academic Wellbeing”. Hultgren’s honest deliberation of the unequal neoliberalist trends by setting difficult to achieve norms and standards in global knowledge certification practices overburdening authors as well as gatekeepers in this chapter is an eye-opener on the not so bright side of the knowledge construction world. Hultgren does not sound unrealistic when she makes the call for transforming the existing system of academic publishing for equality and social justice in the global publishing arena and cautions against the challenges through her skepticism to achieve such difficult goals.

The book is a must read for novice and established scholars alike as well as students of ERPP courses as it not only orients the readers with informative contents on academic publishing but also unravels a number of untrodden areas and uneasy issues that need careful and insightful consideration.

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***Teaching Chinese in the Anglophone World: Perspectives from New Zealand.* Danping Wang and Martin East (Eds.). (2023). Berlin: Springer. Pp. 348. ISBN: 9783031354748 (hbk), ISBN: 9783031354755 (eBook)**

Reviwed by Zhang Luyao and Gong Yang

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In recent years, the Chinese language has expanded its appeal beyond its traditional boundaries and is now attracting diverse groups of learners around the world, including multilingual individuals, sojourners or migrants in China, and those in diaspora communities worldwide (Duff, 2022). This surge has been driven by a confluence of factors, such as China's growing geopolitical and economic power, increasing international trade, and substantial international investment in Chinese language education (Duff et al., 2013). As a result of this rapid spread of Chinese language education, there has been a corresponding increase in scholarly research, reports, and books that explore and examine Chinese language education outside China, especially in the Anglophone world (e.g., Gong et al., 2020; Orton, 2016; Ruan et al., 2015).

New Zealand has a long and extensive history of Chinese immigration and Chinese language education over the past two centuries, but it has received limited attention in the academic discourse, as highlighted by Wang and Martin (p. 4). The absence of New Zealand voices and experiences in research on teaching Chinese as an additional or heritage language leaves "a piece missing from the puzzle of the knowledge map of Chinese language teaching research" (p. 4). *Teaching Chinese in the Anglophone Word: Perspectives from New Zealand*, edited by Danping Wang and Martin East, serves to address this research gap, offering experiences and insights tailored to the country-specific challenges and issues related to Chinese language education in New Zealand.

Moreover, the book also sheds light on the challenges confronting global Chinese language education in the past decade, serving as a response to Bianco's (2011) optimistic prediction regarding the global success of Chinese teaching over a decade ago. In contrast with Bianco's hopeful outlook on the popularity of Chinese teaching, Wang and East's book reports a gradual but steady decline in Chinese language learning over the past decade across all English-speaking countries. This decline is part of a broader crisis in language education that affects many language subjects including Chinese in both the school setting and the higher education setting. In the context of this prolonged and alarming decline, the book emphasizes the importance of leveraging local knowledge, worldviews, and epistemological systems as innovative solutions to address the waning interest in foreign language learning. This emphasis has particular significance for a country like New Zealand, where the sociolinguistic landscape is shaped significantly by a sizable indigenous Maori population (Wang, 2021).

The book, which includes a foreword and an epilogue alongside its main content, is organized into four sections comprising 21 chapters contributed by 29 contributors who are leading scholars, research students, or experienced educators spanning various educational sectors. The book's structure is as follows: Part I offers a *History and Overview* (5 chapters); Part II explores *Chinese as a Heritage Language* (4 chapters); Part III delves into *Chinese Language Teachers and Teaching* (7 chapters); and Part IV focuses on *Distance Learning and Study Abroad* (5 chapters).

Drawing from a multitude of statistical data sources and encompassing information from universities, primary schools, and Confucius Institutes, Part I offers a macro-level perspective on the developmental trajectory of Chinese language education in New Zealand. This section introduces the history of Chinese settlement and the teaching of Chinese as a heritage language in New Zealand, delving into the dynamic evolution of immigration policies that have targeted Chinese immigrants and offering insights into the condition of Confucius Institutes in New Zealand. These chapters collectively form an indispensable backdrop to understand the historical, cultural, and political nuances that underpin Chinese language education in New Zealand.

Part II focuses on Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) learners in New Zealand, from preschool to university levels and encompassing learners with Mandarin-speaking or dialect-speaking backgrounds. These Chinese migrant populations are typically exposed to a wider context of multiple languages and cultures, and their language learning journey goes beyond acquiring language skills; it is a complex process of identity (re)construction and negotiation (Baker, 2011; Gong et al., 2021). This section presents empirical data and cases to illuminate the interaction between identity and CHL learning (e.g., intercultural communicative

competence and investment in Mandarin Chinese). These studies provide readers with a contextualized understanding of the CHL learning process in New Zealand. In particular, one study in this section delves into an often-overlooked facet of CHL education, exploring the learning needs of “gifted” Chinese students (p. 104). This research underscores the pivotal roles of heritage culture and language acquisition in shaping students’ perceptions of gifted and talented education within the New Zealand educational landscape.

Part III highlights the significance of both pedagogical approaches and teachers’ beliefs and perceptions in Chinese language teaching and learning. It includes four chapters dedicated to unraveling teachers’ conceptions and beliefs concerning grammar teaching, assessment, and language pedagogy. The remaining three chapters explore the use of translanguaging as pedagogy to promote intercultural understanding. The chapters offer empirical evidence related to strategies and approaches to enhance Chinese character skills. This comprehensive examination serves as a valuable and profound resource for teachers, providing practical insights to improve the effectiveness of Chinese language learning for students and sustain Chinese language teachers’ continuous professional development.

In recent years, the global educational landscape has undergone rapid and transformative evolution due to various factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing advancement of technologies, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI). This transformation has significantly reshaped language education, including Chinese teaching and learning. Part IV takes a forward-thinking approach by providing valuable data and analysis on distance language learning and international education. This section comprises three chapters exploring the integration of new digital technologies to optimize learning within Chinese distance courses. The chapters provide examples of how one-to-one videoconferencing and micro online one-to-one oral courses in New Zealand can enhance the language skills of Chinese learners. At the same time, this section explores the concept of virtual peer mentoring as a highly beneficial tool to enhance Chinese teachers’ professional development, further contributing to the overall improvement of pedagogical practices.

The final two chapters in this section take a closer look at the study-abroad experiences of New Zealand students in both virtual and physical contexts. The first of these two chapters scrutinizes the motives driving learners as they embark on virtual study-abroad journeys, shedding light on the development of learners’ motivation throughout the process. The second explores the practical aspects of New Zealand students’ use of Chinese language learning strategies while studying in mainland China. These innovations in pedagogical approaches, achieved

by incorporating technology in learning processes, have played a pivotal role in providing students with diverse learning opportunities. Moreover, they have significantly expanded the global reach and accessibility of Chinese language education, enabling a more inclusive and diverse educational landscape.

This volume has two impressive characteristics. First, it stands as a timely response to the current challenges of Chinese language education within the Anglophone World. The expected importance of the Chinese language in school and university curricula in English-speaking countries has been influenced by a variety of sociopolitical, economic, and unforeseen factors (e.g., the global pandemic) (Wang & Chik, 2022). In addition, the dominance of the English language and neoliberal educational orientations (Kubota, 2014) has given rise to the belief among both policymakers and the general public that acquiring additional languages (e.g., Chinese) is unnecessary in the contemporary era (Sharma & Phyak, 2017). Such beliefs unavoidably shape New Zealand residents' attitudes to engaging with Chinese language learning; as reported by Wang and East in this book, a significant number of New Zealand children initiate their Chinese language studies in primary or intermediate schools. However, the majority of these learners do not progress to more advanced levels. In response to these challenges, this book offers a comprehensive examination of the specific case of New Zealand, providing valuable and timely insights to address the current challenges within Chinese language education both locally and globally. Notably, the lessons drawn from this specific case are not limited to Chinese language programs in New Zealand and can also be applied to the broader Anglophone world and beyond.

Second, this volume adopts an ecological perspective to structure its content. It provides a holistic picture of practices and research on Chinese education in New Zealand at the macro (societal, political), meso (institutional), and micro (pedagogical and practical) levels (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). The book begins by providing historical insight into Chinese language education in New Zealand, revealing the prevailing societal ideologies and beliefs regarding the value of the Chinese language and its speakers in the country and thereby contextualizing the subject within a historical, cultural, and political framework (Duff, 2022). Moving to the meso level, the book goes on to examine the various institutional contexts in which Chinese learners are immersed, including community, school, and university settings. Drawing on expertise from well-established researchers and experienced Chinese teachers, the book sheds light on the educational practices, policies, and curriculum development shaping the Chinese educational landscape in New Zealand from early childhood to university levels. Finally, at the micro level, the book scrutinizes the linguistic practices of Chinese learners from diverse backgrounds (e.g., talented students, dialect-speaking students) and the innovative

teaching pedagogies employed by Chinese teachers. These findings emphasize the need for more effective and multifaceted instructional approaches and teacher education to meet diverse learner needs and abilities.

This volume thereby offers a comprehensive and multi-dimensional exploration of Chinese language education in New Zealand, demonstrating the interconnectedness of historical, social, educational, and individual factors by taking a bird's-eye view. It offers a valuable resource for educational policymakers, researchers, and teachers who have been seeking to develop policies and teaching practices to advance Chinese language education in New Zealand and beyond.

In summary, this volume provides a valuable resource that can inform pedagogical practices and guide future research endeavors in Chinese language education. In addition to serving as a point of interest for Chinese teachers, researchers, and educational policymakers in New Zealand, it also extends its relevance to those involved in Chinese language education in diverse local settings.

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***Ethnographic Insights on Latin America and the Caribbean.* Melanie A. Medeiros and Jennifer R. Guzmán (Eds.). (2023). Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pp. 531.
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Reviewed by Francisco Daniel Morales Hernández

El Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico

This edited volume brings together a series of ethnographic explorations into current sociopolitical and environmental Latin American and Caribbean realities. Pressing issues of injustice, inequality, and racism among other phenomena such as global warming, migration, and COVID-19 are examined. The introductory section offers key concepts that frame the following discussions as well as geographical and political delimitations of what constitutes present-day Latin America, the Caribbean, and their linguistic diversity.

This book is organized into 11 interrelated sections. Section 1, “An Introduction to Latin America and the Caribbean,” contains a brief outline of key terms to understand the following three chapters into which it is divided. Chapter 1 by Melanie A. Medeiros and Jennifer R. Guzman focuses on ethnography as a method and a written genre that social scientists employ to study social and cultural events through long-term commitment *in situ*. Chapter 2 by James J. Aimers refers to both the peopling of what is currently known as the Americas and the colonial period. The authors emphasize Indigenous cultures’ presence for a better understanding of the region’s societies. Ryan M. Jones’s Chapter 3 casts a critical eye on the politics of representation of Latin America; its peoples are often represented

as “lacking historical agency” as though their actions were inconsequential (p. 42–43) or their political organization was non-existent in territories unreached by European control.

Section 2, “Race, Racialization and Racism,” is also divided into three chapters. In Chapter 4, L. Kaifa Roland focuses on how the construct of race is shored up by beliefs of place of origin, appearance, and classed behavior in the context of tourism in Cuba. The term *yuma*, applied to a broad sector of non-Cuban tourists who are often assumed to be white, and the wearing of brightly colored bracelets are critical to explain who should have access to affluent tourist places. Jennifer Roth Gordon’s Chapter 5 and Guilberly Louissaint’s Chapter 6 provide us with a view of how social inequality and stigmatization practices may be promoted by institutions respectively. While Chapter 5 examines the privileges of being white by focusing on a white middle-class family who normalizes racial inequality on everyday life in Brazil, Chapter 6 criticizes how Vodou is associated with regressive and dangerous practices that allegedly account for Haiti’s underdevelopment. Both chapters underscore a need for social justice and equality in contexts where anti-Black state violence occurs and where Vodou practitioners have been blamed for a disease such as cholera that was, nonetheless, brought by United Nations peacekeeping troops (Frerichs, 2017).

Section 3, “Ethnicity, Citizenship, and Belonging” focuses on the complex construct of identity associated with ethnicity, language, social class, and Indigenous citizenship. In Chapter 7, Sandhya Kritika Narayanan explores negotiations of linguistic background and Indigenous ethnic identity in Quechua and Aymara speakers in Puno and the Peruvian high plains. The author challenges purist language ideologies that function as legitimizing mechanisms of ethnolinguistic differences and Indigenous citizenship (Abdelhay et al., 2020). The analysis shows that *puneños*’ multilingual repertoires are conceived of as deviations from a pure Quechua. This is also associated with the regional origin of speakers of both Quechua and Aymara in which places such as Cusco in Perú, and La Paz in Bolivia, are deemed more authentic. In Chapter 8, Pablo Jaramillo depicts a top-down attribution of ethnic identities in a post-conflict scenario in which the government implements social inclusion policies. These categorize who may be an Indigenous person. In Chapter 9, La Verne M. Seales Soley (a descendant of West Indians: people of African descent from Jamaica, Martinique, Barbados, and Trinidad) highlights the shifting and relational character of identity as it emerges in discrimination practices that the author autoethnographically captured and faced.

Section 4, “Gender and Intersectionality,” foregrounds such terms as *mari-anismo*, women portrayed as submissive and long suffering in resemblance to the figure of the Virgin Mary, and *machismo*, normative masculinity that depicts a man

as the head of the family but that normalizes male violence (p. 145), to challenge a reductionist force on the diversity of gender experience that the subsequent three chapters analyze. In Chapter 10, Diego Arispe-Bazán focuses on the link between queerness and race to discuss how queer identities intersect with diasporic Indigenous identities in urban Peru. By focusing on a case of queer *limeña*, Arispe-Bazán captures how being brought up outside an Indigenous community, sexuality and gender presentations had a distancing effect on the participant's Indigenous identity and active participation in community rituals. In Chapter 11, Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo scrutinizes the connection between racialization processes underpinning the Mexican war on drugs and how various armed groups perpetrate gender violence. In the Indigenous town of Cherán, Patriarchal violence—"violence that creates or maintains male power and dominance over others or that avenges the loss of men's power" (p. 162)—justifies the author's call to social justice for Indigenous women who are disappeared, raped, and commodified. Chapter 12 by K. Eliza Williamson focuses on the way Brazilian mothers experience social assistance programs and therapeutic resources while caring for their disabled children. Williamson forefronts gendered and racialized inequities by stressing the interrelationship of the Zika virus, limited financial resources, and lack of employment with which low-income Black and Brown women often struggle.

Section 5, "Language and Society," contains three chapters that concentrate on colonial, creole, immigrant, and Indigenous languages at various scales in Latin America. Josep Cru's Chapter 13 focuses on bottom-up language revitalization efforts of Yucatec Maya whose speakers have set out to maintain and promote through rap. This functions as an innovative language policy by encouraging younger generations to use the Mayan language to counteract discrimination and top-down homogenizing national language policies (Terborg & García Landa, 2021). In Chapter 14, Mariana F. Past focuses on the linguistic activism led by a Haitian-Cuban poet who uses the potential of Kreyòl poetry to create new narratives that could foreground and counteract the denial of Creole Culture in Cuba. The author highlights the social relevance of *Nostalji*, a term that combats internalized racism—"a phenomenon wherein people of color absorb and unconsciously perpetuate societal prejudices against themselves" (p. 211). Chapter 15 by Keisha Wiel explores the use of Dutch over Papiamentu as the language of instruction in a high school setting in the Island nations of Aruba and Curaçao where Papiamentu, English, Dutch, and Spanish are the main spoken languages. The ideological construction of Dutch as the language of educational success as well as the agency of speakers are examined as the author discusses how high school students challenge monolingual Dutch policies by translanguaging.

This illustrates speakers' multilingual practices (Wei, 2018) that privilege effective communication and understanding of content in physics among peers who had trouble understanding Dutch.

Section 6, "Politics and Power," offers both a historical and contemporary analysis of bureaucratic and authoritarian regimes as well as political and social movements that have shaped some Latin American regions. In Chapter 16, Karleen Jones West scrutinizes campaign clientelism in Oaxaca, Mexico. This study sheds light on voters' attitudes in election campaigns by pointing to candidates' multiple resources as well as highlighting voters' agency and knowledge of candidates' capacity to keep their promises. In Chapter 17, Luminița-Anda Mandache underscores people's understanding of the local tensions and benefits created by an NGO's presence that intertwines with private interests and macro politics (Romano, 2016). In Chapter 18, Maria J. Azocar focuses on the science-based knowledge of economists who mobilize gender ideologies. As the author demonstrates, the power of masculinity is consequential on the persuasive character that state authorities also promote. In Chapter 19, Matthew Doyle concentrates on the conflict between different forms of local authority in an Indigenous community. Mathew Doyle describes how a dispute between two families over arable land scaled up to a conflict between *ayllu* authorities and peasant union leaders. The ownership of land and what community means are treated as monolithic by the government.

"Political Violence and Its Legacies" constitute Section 7. Terms such as disappearance, collective memory, political violence, and armed conflict inform the subsequent discussions. Ana Guglielmucci and Esteban Rozo author Chapter 20. It offers an ethnographic turn of the arts in that Colombian artists' work transcends the physical limits of the studio to engage with people and victims without using explicit images of violence. This work captures the political potential of art to foster collective memory through symbolic reparations such as the creation of new spaces to honor the memory of the victims. In Chapter 21, Nick Morgan, Philippa Page, and Cecilia Sosa compare how Colombian and Argentinian audiences make sense of structural violence. By showing the Colombian audience screenings of torture and disappearance in Argentina's 1976 military coup and providing the Argentinian audience with the case of "false positives" in Colombia, the authors conclude that each audience explained violence on local terms, but they also refer to shared concerns such as gender-based violence and growing levels of poverty in both countries.

Sara Maya Rossen's Chapter 22 deals with people's bureaucratic problems to find their loved ones in Guatemala's (non) clandestine cemeteries. The author stresses people's experience of social injustice with which they must put up in a context where foreign-funding bodies dictate local forensic labs who should have

access to their services. In Chapter 23, Bruno Renero-Hannan explores the effects of political imprisonment on families in Mexico. As other studies have emphasized the importance of taking sides (Armbruster & Laerke, 2008), this chapter provides an activist anthropological take conjugated with *testimonio*—a “literary genre that blends personal narrative with accounts of broader political and collective struggles” (p. 323)—to narrate the stories of those in prison and their families linked to a political system of surveillance.

Section 8, “Poverty, Precarity and Resilience,” offers a complex picture of neocolonialism and people’s ability to overcome challenges created by structural violence. Chapter 24 by Charles H. Klein presents contrasting visions of urban life in Brazil. Such visions are mobilized in a complex way by the conservative and more left-wing orientations of social sectors that define the periphery through the frequent othering of working-class people as “distinct species” (p. 347) from businessmen and bankers. In Chapter 25, Christine Hippert examines *fiao* (on credit) to ethnographically show people’s ability to create support networks that also provide a context-sensitive exploration of discrimination in the Dominican Republic. In Chapter 26, Katie Nelson presents the case study of Juana, an Indigenous woman navigating and challenging local gender-based social structures in Chiapas. This study does not overlook structural factors and discrimination that constrain Juana’s economic and social life. In Chapter 27, Melissa Cambero Scott focuses on music as a social element and a form of nationalism that unites people socially and politically in the aftermath of a natural disaster in Puerto Rico.

Section 9, “Development and Sustainability” comprises three chapters. Sharon Gorenstein Rivera writes Chapter 28 and focuses on notions of development and risk in Perú, while Emma Banks (Chapter 29) and Alessandro Morosin (Chapter 30) concentrate on autonomous consultation and territory as well as corporate rhetoric of development and mining industries in Colombia and Mexico, respectively. These three chapters mainly describe the pollution of land and water and the social tensions caused by liberal capitalism promoting the idea of economic growth as development.

Section 10 offers a critical view of “Tourism and its Effects” in three regions: Northeast Brazil by Melanie A. Medeiros and Tiffany Henriksen, the Ecuadorian Amazon by Sarah Rachelle Renkert, and Yucatan in Mexico by Kristi Krumrine. These chapters individually examine occupational segregation impacting Afro-descendant Brazilians’ socioeconomic mobility, the external force of capitalism shaping a *Kichwa Añangu* community’s resilient cultural practices as well as the effects of tourism on children’s health and growth. These studies problematize tourism that worsens tensions and inequalities.

In Section 11, “Migration and Kinship,” Caitlin E. Fouratt, Nora Haenn, and Malte Gembus individually examine complex dynamics of internal, international, and transnational migration in such contexts as Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Mexico, the United States, and Guatemala. Their studies stress the importance of online social networks, ideologies of patriarchy, and border-crossing storytelling to account for people’s political engagement in both sending and receiving societies as well as gender-based regimes of mobility and the negotiation of intergenerational identities.

In conclusion, this book contributes to Latin American studies that have concentrated on tensions, injustice, and power in the region (Telles, 2014). By drawing on ethnography, this book underscores its pedagogic and epistemological value as well as encourages academic audiences, government institutions, and legislators to support people in their struggles. However, this edited volume could have benefitted from a critical focus on how education has been affected by different forms of violence in the region. Violence constitutes a major factor that accounts for school dropout and issues of mobility. In countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador, schools have been identified as forced recruitment sites by criminal gangs whose presence also makes it difficult to attend schools (Lázaro Lorente & Lorente Rodríguez, 2023). These are social realities that also demand greater ethnographic attention since they can be regarded as a part of the structural inequality that the edited volume insightfully captures.

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