

Exploring Name Tendency: Taking Children's Names as a Case

Junxin Wan^{1,a,*}

¹*Suzhou Foreign Language School, 201st Zhu Yuan Rd., SuZhou, China*

a. katewan@ldy.edu.rs

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This paper is inspired by a chapter talking about name bias in the book *Freakonomics* by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner and it discusses names (including first name and last name), typically children's names from two perspectives, namely semantics of names and pragmatics of names. This paper also analyzes the way that the names of children are given by their parents in different countries, particularly in China and Germany, with the impact that these names have on children's personality and career development. A name may seem like a simple combination of letters, but its impact on people may be much greater than imagined, whether in school or the workplace. Prejudice is the key factor that these consequences can have on a child's future, such as 'black-sounding' names or gender-specific names. However, these biases are generally subconscious, and it is difficult for people to realize this and prevent such prejudice.

Keywords: names, job, tendency, prejudice, children

1. Introduction

This paper is enlightened by *Freakonomics* by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. In this book series, they talked about the effects of names in two chapters.

Everybody's life begins with their name. Many parents struggled for days on end to give their children respectable names. If their children were unfortunate enough to receive an incorrect name, it is said that they would most likely fail in life. Many parents claim that names have aesthetic values, and can predict one's future. However, there are still many doubts about whether a name will affect one's future. Does the name reflect the parents' life? Does it have such significant effects on one's life? Or does it have some other functions?

2. Overview of Name Tendency

A name is a word or a set of words that the person is referred to. Name is the identity of a person that is likely to accompany them for their whole life, so people cannot ignore its significance. Typically, parents or grandparents choose names for their grandchildren, though some may decide to change their names after they are older if they are not happy with them. When attempting to come up with a name, many factors are taken into account. For instance, cultural background, wishes, and the aesthetic value of the name.

First, names are inextricably linked to kinship. In French, since 1st Jan. 2005, a child can be named according to his or her father or mother or even both of them, even if parents have the same sex [1]. In general, a Chinese child's surname is also taken after the parents, meaning that the child must adopt the surname of one parent. It dates back a very long time. Although people in ancient China did not have family names, there was a myth that the emperor bestowed them. Women adopt their husband's surname after being married to signify their marital status. This phenomenon occurred not only in China but also in other countries such as the United States. However, some may still preserve her original surname [2]. Although children are not legally required to take their parents' last names, and can also take the names of other immediate family members or other legal guardians, most people still have the same last name as their parents due to this prolonged history.

People rarely make careful considerations about surnames. However many parents struggle to come up with what they think is the best name for their child. In China, many parents now even seek help online. According to *Freakonomics*, two American parents named their children 'Winner' and 'Loser'. But the lives of the two children turned out to be unexpected. The man named Loser has made a name for himself. He eventually got a job in the police station and was promoted to superintendent. The child named Winner, however, has been charged with multiple crimes, including theft and domestic violence. This example proves that names can hardly affect people's future development. But many people still believe that a good name will bring good luck to a child. According to California data from *Freakonomics*, most parents use names to express their expectations. Although the name may not make a difference, parents can get a sense of achievement that they did their best for their children from the very start. In China, many people change their names when they grow up because they believe that they are unsatisfied with their names. They regard the name change as a new start in life. Therefore, they have a more positive attitude towards life. It must be acknowledged, nonetheless, that the child is affected by the name to some extent. Children with entertaining homophones for names may face bullying from their peers, or they may reluctantly receive nicknames, etc. It is simple to make kids feel inadequate in this way. For instance, in China, a person may not be viewed favorably by the other sex if they have an old-fashioned name. Even though a potential employer may have only seen the name on their résumé, it may still leave a bad impression.

Another consideration for the name has to do with the social background and the upbringing of the parents. In the 20th century, for example, many Chinese names had patriotic connotations, and that was precisely when the New China was founded.

3. The Semantics of Names

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the meaning of names is related to the wishes of parents. In China, many parents even seek the help of naming masters. This is closely related to traditional Chinese culture, such as the Five Elements, Eight Characters of One's Birth, or the Book of Changes. For example, if a person is found to lack water in the five elements, the radical of their name will often be related to the water character. Chinese parents prefer to use naming to improve their baby's luck. For example, when predicting according to the Eight Characters that a baby has an unruly personality, it is recommended to use words related to morality to modify the child's personality. The naming of the Book of Changes is a numerology that encompasses comprehensive concepts such as mathematics, yin-yang, five-element studies, psychology, philosophy, and even natural sciences. It stated that names are a set of symbols, and the naming of the Book of Changes involves analyzing the meanings and auspicious and inauspicious meanings implied by the symbols that make up the name. Chinese people have a genealogy as well. The names of each generation's ancestors must contain a single member of the line of characters that their ancestors mentioned in their genealogy. Chinese people pay less attention to choosing names in other languages, nevertheless. From a

foreigner's perspective, some could look a little absurd, like the name "Apple." Some people's English names are homophones, while others may choose names that read easily or are the same as the names of their favorite celebrities.

The naming method in other regions is very different from China. For example, German naming habits are similar to those of Anglo-Australians [3]. Most Germans have two names (one as a first name and one as a middle name) and a last name. Family names are generally passed down through the father's bloodline [3]. Women usually take their husband's name when they marry, but sometimes also decide to keep their maiden name [3]. In addition, German first and middle names have gender characteristics and are chosen by the parents [3]. Traditionally, children are named after their grandparents, but this custom is disappearing [3]. In the past, the most common and traditional German names were derived from the Bible, such as Georg and Christina [3]. Besides, in Germany, a common surname is named after occupation in ancient times. For example, Müller (miller), Fischer (fisherman), Schneider (tailor), Bäcker (baker), and Wagner (vehicle manufacturer). Another characteristic of German names is that parents tend to choose a traditional name for their child, rather than a creative and new one. Here is a list of the 30 most preferable names for both genders in Germany [4].

Table 1: Thirty Most Preferable German Names [4].

	Boys' Name	Girls' name
1	Noah	Emilia
2	Matteo	Mia
3	Elias	Sophia
4	Finn	Emma
5	Leon	Hannah
6	Theo	Lina
7	Paul	Mila
8	Emil	Ella
9	Henry	Leni
10	Ben	Clara
11	Louis	Marie
12	Luca	Lia
13	Leo	Lea
14	Felix	Mathilda
15	Liam	Leonie
16	Jonas	Ida
17	Jakob	Lilly
18	Lukas	Luisa
19	Levi	Anna
20	Anton	Emily
21	Maximilian	Frieda
22	Milan	Maja
23	Jonah	Amelie
24	Oskar	Charlotte
25	Lio	Sophie
26	Jannis	Lena
27	David	Nele
28	Max	Mira

Table 1: (continued).

29	Mohammed	Johanna
30	Moriz	Lara

Table 1 shows the thirty most frequent names chosen by German parents for their kids, most of which are still traditional names. However, it is also stated that German parents are becoming more creative when choosing the first name for their children [5]. Individuality and globalization have created new trends in names from other cultures. These names were introduced into Germany, and even if some were merely spelling changes, they could add an exotic twist to common names. Some parents want to merge two names from the family's history. For example, Thorsten and Dieter were merged into Thodi. Another example is that a German-African baby's second name combines Africa and Europe: Afrope.

4. The Pragmatics of Names

Although it is mentioned above that Chinese people name their children to change their children's future fortunes, many of them also change their own or their family's fortunes. However, this type of name is sometimes disliked by children, which makes it likely that they will choose a new name when they are adults. For example, in some families, especially those decades ago, there is a bad habit of preferring sons to daughters. Therefore, many girls' names will carry the meaning of "expecting a younger brother", and parents believe that this name will cause their next child to be a boy. In China, the homonym of names is a very important thing, because some may sound like death or misfortune, so it is taboo. Another reason is that those whose names are funny may be called nicknames by classmates and laughed at by friends, which is also not conducive to children's physical and mental development. The child may feel inferior, or it may damage the family relationship because they will blame the parents for giving them such a name.

There is also evidence to support the idea that names matter a lot at work. The foundation of a person's identity is their name. Names can be used to identify a single person, a family, a race, or a culture. Learning your coworkers' names at work shows respect, but it also promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion. When someone's name is frequently mispronounced, they experience isolation and shame. It is crucial to address people by their correct names and appropriately choose names since no one wants to feel such negative emotions [6]. When a person's name is too difficult to pronounce, teachers or leaders may avoid mentioning the person's name for fear of mispronouncing it, so they may have fewer promotion opportunities.

In addition, a name may affect employment for the following four reasons. They are by race, alphabetical order, gender, and age [7]. After the 1965 Race Relations Act was enacted, sociologists decided to investigate how widespread racial discrimination in hiring was. *Freakonomics* mentions a study that sent two identical resumes to prospective employers. The only difference is that one uses a traditional English name and the other uses an "ethnic" name. The names sounded like a white received more favorable reviews, even though they had the same qualifications and experience [7]. In the United States, when applicants have the same qualifications, candidates with white-sounding names are favored more than others. Ethnic minority applicants in the UK have to submit 60 percent more cover letters than white applicants to get an interview [7]. Second, the alphabetical order of the name is also essential for career prospects. Due to the primacy effect, the first information a person sees takes on more significance [7]. As a result, people whose names are earlier in the alphabet, coming up first on registers or grading tables, may unconsciously be treated more kindly by teachers. Third, in most cases, names also indicate your gender. Using the same methodology as the racial discrimination study, the researchers found evidence of sexism, with only traditional male and female

names different when the resumes were the same [7]. There was discrimination against both genders. As a result, men are more likely to be employed in professions like engineering that are typically viewed as more masculine. Researchers discovered that companies discriminated against male applicants for positions that were thought to be more common among women, such as secretarial employment. Fourth, a name may also be a sign of age. A person of a certain age may come to mind when hearing the names Agatha or Albert [7]. When the researchers used two resumes that have differences only in birth date and year of graduation to apply for jobs hiring “recent graduates,” they found that older applicants experienced age discrimination 60 percent of the time. However, when the researchers applied for more senior retail manager positions, they found that 30 percent of the discrimination favored applicants with higher ages [7]. Also, there are other studies about the pragmatics of names [8-10].

5. Conclusions

In a word, a name is very important for a person, because it may accompany him for his whole life and affect his study, career, and even character development. When people see a person’s name for the first time, they will assume an image of this person in their mind, but this will affect their judgment because the preconceived image will make them biased against this person. However, when they make such biased decisions, they often do not recognize such prejudice, as such prejudice is unconscious. Parents could put a little more effort into choosing the right name for their child, which will benefit the child greatly. But the problem of naming a child has been a headache for many generations of parents for years. Parents may struggle to find a proper name and they may even end up with an unsatisfied name after endless brainstorming. How to choose the right name remains a mystery.

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