

# THE PHONETIC GENDER SCORE OF GERMAN FIRST NAMES AND PET NAMES

Gendered first names versus  
de-gendered pet names

*Av Damaris Nübling<sup>1</sup>*

In Germany, there are two strictly segregated inventories of female and male first names. The rigid line between these two classes of sex-specific names is well taken care of. Transgressions or even ambiguous cases such as unisex names are not accepted (for most recent changes with regard to the names of transgender people see Schmidt-Jüngst 2014). If there is a gender-ambiguous name for a new born it is a matter of public interest. Every newspaper will report on this as it was the case for the name *Euro* which was intended to be given to a girl in 2008. *Euro* did not constitute a problem because a currency might be considered inappropriate for a baby, the problem was rather that *Euro* sounded like a boys' name and therefore was not acceptable to name a girl. The register office then proposed the name *Eurone* which finally was cho-

1 The author is member of the research unit "Un/doing Differences. Practices in Human Differentiation" at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU), which is supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, FOR 1939).

Innovationer i namn och namnmönster. NORNA-rapporter 92, 2015.  
Red. av: Emilia Aldrin, Linnea Gustafsson, Maria Löfdahl & Lena Wenner.

sen by the parents.

The two sex-specific name classes contain, at first sight, very heterogeneous names such as *Doris, Ruth, Janina, Susanne, Christina, Kerstin, Almut, Lea, Jana, Elke, Mechthild* on the one side and *Klaus, Benjamin, Uwe, Elias, Wolfgang, Luca, Helmut, Norbert, Sebastian, Boris, Noah* on the other side. Some of them have to be learned by rote (e.g. *Helmut* or *Boris* for a male and *Almut* or *Doris* for a female). Others diverge considerably on the prosodic and phonological level, e.g. *Peter* (with two syllables and the stress ahead) for a male and *Katharina* (with four syllables with the stress behind and ending in *-a*) for a female. Speakers of German are not only aware of these sex-specific features passively, they even use them actively if they have to decode gender from an unknown name. Typical female features are longer names (two and more syllables), open syllables, non-initial stress and final *-a* or *-e*. Typical male features are short names (monosyllabics), closed syllables, initial stress and ending in a consonant (see Oelkers 2003). Depending on how many of these features are present, we can distinguish different degrees of femaleness and maleness on names, which means that there is a phonological scale (and not a dichotomy) between male and female names. Therefore, it will be demonstrated how a phonetic gender score could be developed, how it can be used and how big the difference between the average of the current male and female names in Germany is. Finally, pet names which are derived from first names such as *Babs* < *Barbara* or *Andy* < *Andreas* will be analysed. It will be shown that their phonological gender score difference is much smaller than that of official names. This surprising result needs explanation.

From a universal point of view, there are three strategies to indicate gender on names: a) semantically, b) formally and c) conventionally (see Figure 1).

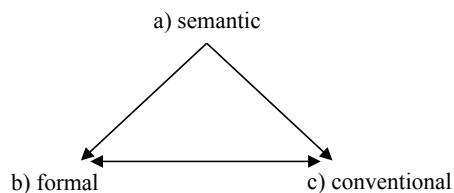


Figure 1. Different strategies to mark gender on names (according to Alford 1988).

In former times, we used a semantic system, e.g. *Gudrun* for girls, an originally Scandinavian name which contains Old Norse *gud* 'god' and *rún* 'secret'

or *Eberhard* 'strong like a boar' for boys. These names expressed wishes the parents had for their child. By and by, this strategy became unproductive and turned into a conventional one, enlarged by many Christian names which often already had (or later got) specific endings (e.g. *Martin* - *Martina*, *Manuel* - *Manuela*, *Peter* - *Petra*). Therefore, German first names today belong to both non-semantic types b) and c). Semantics nowadays doesn't play any role, not even the etymological meaning of the name.

In the United States, first names may be invented and unisex names are legally accepted. Nevertheless, gender is also often visible although many names are inventions. In 1995, Lieberson & Mikelson conducted an experiment which was repeated by Gerhards (2003) with German students: 16 new and thus unknown names had to be assigned a gender. The vast majority of the American and German students (correctly) decided that *Lamecca*, *Timitra*, *Maleka*, *Sukoya*, *Furelle*, *Shatrye* were female and *Husan*, *Oukayod*, *Cagdaz*, *Gerais*, *Rashueen* were male names, except for *Furelle*, which in fact is designated to name a man. Only five names, *Shameki* (♀), *Chanti* (♂), *Kariffe* (♀), *Jorell* (♂) and *Triciaan* (♀), were difficult to decide on especially for the German test persons because such names are rather unknown in Germany. In any case, observation of phonological structures was used to assign gender. We are able to actively apply our phonological gender knowledge to new or unknown names. The final sounds *-a* and *-e* obviously trigger female and final consonants male classification. Problems arise with names ending on *-i* which occurs in names of both sexes; *Chanti* sounds like a unisex pet name. This is a rather important fact to which we will return to later.

The fact that a person's sex is deducible from the name body can be explained by the statistically most frequent and salient differences between male and female first names in German. Table 1 contains the most important features, based in the top 200 names of people born between 1930 and 2012. In sum, this represents the currently living German population.

## THE PHONETIC GENDER SCORE OF GERMAN FIRST NAMES AND PET NAMES 199

Table 1. The most salient properties of German female and male first names (top 200).

	Female names	Male names
	Top 100	Top 100
number of syllables	Ø 2.54	Ø 1.92
primary stress	first syllable: 67% different syllable: 33%	first syllable: 90% different syllable: 10%
ratio of consonants and vowels	C<V: 22% C=V: 40.5% C>V: 37.5%	C<V: 10% C=V: 33% C>V: 57%
stressed vowel	palatal: 55%	palatal: 42%
final sound	-V: 78.5% -C: 21.5%	-V: 19% -C: 81%

All in all, female names are longer (2.5 syllables against 1.9), they are not only stressed on the first syllable similarly compared with male names, they contain more vowels, their stressed vowels more often are palatals (a weak criterion), and, above all, they very often end in a vowel ("V") instead of a consonant ("-C"). Especially the last feature is a hard criterion and thus very distinctive compared to male names: Female names end in a vowel in nearly 80% of all cases, male names only in 19% of all cases, whereas the latter end in a consonant in a bit more than 80% of all cases. Thus, the final sounds are almost exactly inversely distributed. Every German uses this (unconscious) knowledge if s/he is confronted with an unknown first name and has to decode the gender.

It goes without saying that there are female names with a rather male structure and vice versa. The decisive question is which names are actually chosen by the German population. Figure 2 shows a list of different names arranged between the poles between prototypically female (in bold face type) and prototypically male names (in italics). On the left and the right side are the prototypical phonological differences between the names of both sexes. As the stress position is not deducible from the writing, it was added by using stress signs in Figure 2, except for monosyllabic names.

"female"					"male"			
<b>Mari</b> ánne	<b>Lilly</b>	<b>Jan</b> ína	<b>Nic</b> óle	<b>Sán</b> dra	<b>Í</b> ngrid	<b>Gér</b> trud	<b>Ú</b> te	<b>Ruth</b>
<b>Lili</b> áne	<b>Sabr</b> ína	<b>Mé</b> lanie	<b>Iv</b> ónne	<b>Kár</b> in	<b>Dó</b> ris	<i>Hé</i> lmut	<i>Pé</i> ter	<i>Kla</i> us
<b>Ang</b> élika	<b>Lé</b> a	<i>Nico</i>	<i>Jú</i> lian	<i>Lé</i> on	<i>Bó</i> ris	<i>Thó</i> rsten	<i>Hans</i>	<i>Ber</i> nd
<i>Maxim</i> ilian	<i>Noá</i> h	<i>Jón</i> as	<i>Lú</i> ca	<i>Lú</i> kas	<i>Gér</i> hard	<i>Max</i>	<i>Rolf</i>	<i>Hor</i> st

many syllables	one syllable
stress behind first syllable	stress on first syllable
more full vowels	few full vowels
palatals	velars
vocalic final sound	consonantal final sound
many nasals/liquids/[j]	many obstruents
many open syllables	closed syllables
few consonant clusters	many consonants

Figure 2. Prototypical and non-prototypical male and female first names in German.

The important thing is that there are nevertheless names which "disobey" sex-specific characteristics: A male name like *Noah* – currently one of the most popular names! – displays many female characteristics and does hardly differ from *Lea* – and a female name like *Ruth* exhibits many male features, especially monosyllabism. In the middle of the scale, the female name *Doris* is exactly in the same position as the male name *Boris*: They share the same features but not the same gender. The relevant question is which names are selected from this huge inventory during which time span (Duden «Lexikon der Vornamen» contains more than 8.000 first names).

## Some historical developments towards more androgynous structures

If we take a short look at some historical developments, so called bound name-giving (transmission of names) was the dominant social practice during many centuries. The children automatically got the names of their parents, grandparents or godfathers, the names of honored saints, monarchs etc. Even before a child was born, its name was determined. This recycling led to the effect that a high percentage of the population shared only few names. Many people had the same names – which eventually led to the emergence of family names. When naming traditions became more detached from family tradi-

tions, which involved a long process starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new names entered the name inventory, among them many names from other countries of high prestige. Nowadays, euphony is the most important motivation for naming. Today, a name has to be pleasant and to sound nice (see Debus 1985, Kleinteich 1992) whatever this precisely means (usually a high amount of sonority, few consonant clusters and full vowels in unstressed positions). Today, naming knows no bounds and names are as individual as never before.

If we take a look at the historical development of the choice of first names, it becomes evident that the phonological distance between male and female names diminished during the last decades. Possibly, this can be explained by the deep-going social movement of achieving gender equality. Based on the top 20 female and male names given from 1945 up until now, the most important changes between both sexes were investigated (see Nübling 2009, 2012). Here, only one feature, the length of the names measured by the number of syllables is chosen: Figure 3 shows that since the 1970s, female and male names have converged with respect to their length: In the beginning (in 1945), they differed in a whole syllable – whereas now, the difference is only a quarter of a syllable. The straight line below relates to common nouns which on average have 1.7 syllables. Initially, the boys' names started together with the common nouns, whereas girls' names already were considerably longer. Starting in the sixties, female names became shorter whereas males names became longer. Since 1970, a clear development towards an 'androgynous' length can be observed. This corresponds to the end of bound naming (Debus 1985, Nübling 2014). As girls' names were not affected by the son and heir principle because they usually married into another family, their names clearly diverged more from the common noun structures than male names already in beginning of the study in 1945.

Further changes concern the elimination of consonant clusters in the names of both sexes though male names such as *Heinz* [nts], *Klaus*, *Rolf*, *Bernd* originally contained more clusters. Today they hardly occur anymore (always related to the top 20 names). Concerning the vowels in unstressed syllables such as [a, o, i, e], it can be observed it was particularly the male names that became more «feminine» by getting longer and adopting more full vowels in unstressed syllables instead of schwa, compare *Uwe*, *Günther* and *Rainer* in 1945 with *Sebastian*, *Andreas* and *Michael* in the 1970ies. On the other hand, female names became shorter which is accompanied by a decrease of full vowels in unstressed syllables. All in all, the names of both sexes became more similar over time, above all during the seventies and the nineties. Social gender equality is mirrored by the choice of names which tend to more andro-

gynous structures. Behind the scenes, the strict and rather expensive segregation of female and male names which leads to coexistence of two huge separated inventories is undermined by the choice of phonological structures: Here, the society reflects social evolution and social reality. For further details see Nübling (2009, 2012).

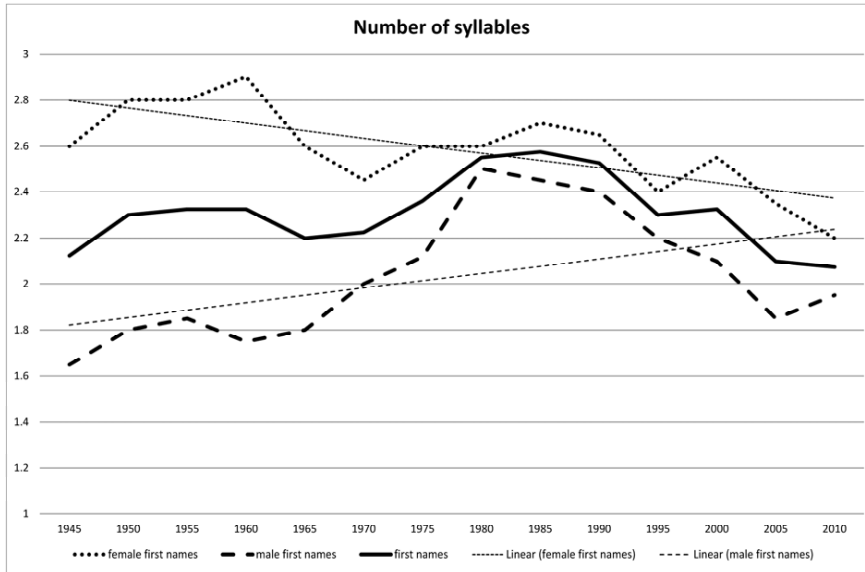


Figure 3. The diachronic «androgynization» of German first names with regard to their length (Nübling 2009 s. 345).

## The phonetic gender score of first names

Now we turn back to the most characteristic phonological gender differences found in the 200 most frequent names of the living German population born between 1930 and 2012 (Table 1). These names were transcribed. In order to generate a phonetic gender score, we used a similar method as Barry & Harper (1995, 1998) for American names. However, we considered phonological and prosodic criteria more predominantly, which are all based on the most salient sex-diverging structures of the 200 most frequent German first names in Table 1: It is obvious that male and female names differ in length (female names are

## THE PHONETIC GENDER SCORE OF GERMAN FIRST NAMES AND PET NAMES 203

around 0.5 syllables longer), in stress position (female names are more often stressed on a non-initial syllable – in 33% – than male names with only 10%) and in the ratio of vowels and consonants (female names clearly have more vowels and open syllables); most important is the final sound whereas palatal or non-palatal vowels do not behave very sex-specific; this criterion was neglected. Altogether, we considered a) the final sound, b) the number of syllables in combination with the stress position, and c) the C/V-ratio.

Table 2 contains a detailed list of the precise differences between female and male names. In a first attempt, which only has preliminary character, these differences were assigned a score (see Table 3). Positive values represent female and negative values male characteristics. It was tried to represent the real proportions as exactly as possible. This led to three separate calculations a) to c) (in Table 3) representing the most important features, above all the final sound.

Table 2: The most important differences of the 200 most frequent German first names (100 female + 100 male names).

<u>a) Final sound</u>	<u>total number</u>	<u>female</u>	<u>male</u>
-[a]:	50	98%	2%
-[ə]:	21	95%	5%
-[i(:)]:	7	100%	
-[æ]	2	50%	50%
-sonorant (N/L except r):	43	30%	70%
-plosive:	33	21%	79%
-fricative:	25	4%	96%
-[e]:	11	9%	91%
-[o]:	4		100%
-[e:]:	2		100%
-[ɪ]:	1		100%
<u>b) Number of syllables, stress position</u>			
1 syllable:	27		100%
2 syllables, initial stress:	101	47%	53%
2 syllables, final stress:	8	75%	25%
3 syllables, initial stress:	25,5	65%	35%
3 syllables, no initial stress:	24	79%	21%
4+ syllables	15,5	81%	19%
<u>c) Ratio vowels/consonants</u>			
C<V:	23	83%	17%
C=V:	58,5	70%	30%
C>V:	118,5	33%	67%



Table 3. Conversion of the sex-diverging features in plus (female) and minus (male) values.

## a) Final sound

+3	-[a], -[ə]	Anna, Sabine
+2	-[i(:)]	Marie, Leonie
0	-[æ] / -[ɔə]	Dagmar, Lothar
-1	sonorant (N/L except r)	Jasmin, Sven
-2	plosive, -[e:], -[ɪ]	Robert, André, Kai
-3	fricative, -[ɸ], -[ɔ]	Rolf, Peter, Nico

## b) Number of syllables, stress position:

+3	4 (or more) syllables, stress on first syllable	Rósemarie
+2	3-4 syllables, stress behind	Katharina, Andréas
+1	3 syllables, stress ahead 2 syllables, stress behind	Léonie Marie, Nicóle
0	2 syllables, stress ahead	Anna, Peter
-3	1 Silbe	Rolf, Jan

## c) Ratio consonants/vowels:

+2	C<V	Anna, Uwe
+1	C=V	Sophie, Tobias
-2	C>V	Christina, Alexander

If we have a look at the monosyllabic names, it turns out to be an exclusively male characteristic: 100% of monosyllabic names are male names (Table 2). Here, we assigned a score of -3 which is a pretty high amount of masculinity. Polysyllabic names are shared by both sexes in different ways which also is directly reflected in the plus and minus values. Two syllables with initial stress e.g. occur more or less equally and therefore led to a neutral score of zero points.

In order to get a complete gender score, the separate calculations a), b) and c) have to be summed up. This leads to a scale from plus 8 (representing maximal femaleness) to minus 8 (representing maximal maleness). Thus, every name can be assigned a specific gender score. Of course, there are male names with a rather high degree of phonological femaleness and vice versa (see Figure 4). They are however exceptions.

Some examples should be explained, e.g. *Anneliese*: The final sound of this name is -e which makes 3 points. Furthermore, it consists of four syllables with the primary stress in the first one (+3 points) and finally it has more vowels than consonants (+2 points). All in all, it reaches 8 points and sounds extremely feminine. *Marlies*, on the other hand, in ending in a fricative (-3 points), comprises only two syllables with the stress ahead (0 points), and it has more consonants than vowels (-2 points), resulting in -5 points. *Marlies* is similar to *Thomas* with the same value.

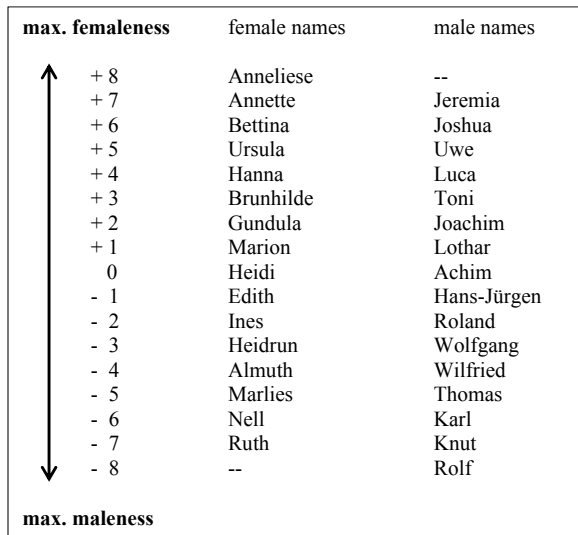


Figure 4. The phonetic gender score as a scale ranging from +8 to -8 with examples.

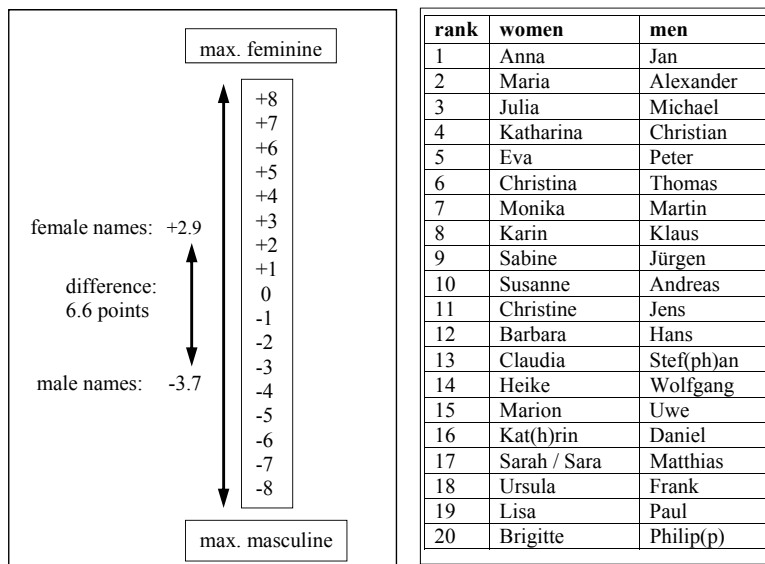


Figure 5. Average gender score of the 200 most frequent first names in Germany (left) and list of Germany's top 20 (right).

In a further step, the average gender score of the 200 most frequent womens' and mens' names was calculated (Figure 5). The average score for the current-most frequent womens' names is +2.9 and that for the mens' names is -3.7. This leads to a gender score difference of 6.6 points. At the right side, there is a list of Germany's top 20 names.

Summing up, there are two different sex-specific classes of first names from which names for newborns have to originate. If we consider the most frequently chosen names, they show sex-specific differences on the phonological and prosodic level. The most frequent and salient differences constitute the base for the development of a gender score which ranges from +8 to -8. The average distance of the top 200 of the assigned first names in Germany is 6.6 points which serves as a point of comparison for other types of names as, e.g. pet names (next section) or name changes of transgender people (see Schmidt-Jüngst in this volume).

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that this calculation is only a first proposal which probably will be modified when applied on more data. Some features might be overrepresented because they are interrelated with other features; for instance, monosyllabism is strongly connected with initial stress and with final consonants.

## The phonetic gender score of pet names

Pet names are unofficial names which are used in intimate contexts: between two people, lovers, partners, children, parents and their children, friends, etc. As intimate relationships are very difficult to investigate, there are only few representative studies about pet names, their creation and their use. It is even difficult to collect them because the interviewees do not like to reveal the true names they use despite the interviewer's guarantee of absolute anonymity and confidentiality.

With regard to their function, pet names do not primarily identify someone or refer to a person. This is not necessary as the person is already named and often present in the conversation. They rather denote or even create the social relation between two individuals and its emotional evaluation be it a positive (pet name) or negative one (nickname).

In Germany, there are only some investigations about pet names and nicknames from the 1970ies; in every respect, there is a big lack of research. However, we know that children have, use and give most pet names. The young-

er the children, the more pet names they have and also give, which can be explained by their social instability. Their social role and position is not yet established. About 70% of the investigated pupils have a pet name with girls having quite substantially more pet names than boys.

For our investigation we used the only representative corpus which was compiled by Horst Naumann (1976). More recent investigations which can be considered representative do not exist. Naumann collected hundreds of unofficial names. Here, I only consider a subset of the pet names, i.e. those which are derived from first names, e.g. *Babs* < *Barbara*, *Uli* < *Ulrich*. In order to compare their gender scores we need to know the official first name as base of the unofficial pet name. All in all, Naumann interviewed 2,200 pupils between 10 and 15 years in 17 towns and villages in the German Democratic Republic in 1968 and 1970. He asked them to write down the pet names of the other children ensuring that their data will be treated confidentially. Our basis consists of 333 female first names and their corresponding pet names and 293 male first names and their corresponding pet names. Here, only the types are represented. Unfortunately, Naumann did not publish the tokens. However, he sometimes mentions that certain pet names were created «frequently». These imprecise statements cannot be used here, they must be ignored. Of course, it makes a big difference whether the first name *Christian* was changed to *Chrissy* twenty times or only once; here, *Chrissy* could only be counted as one type, together with *Chris*, *Krischan* etc. It is obvious that further investigation has to consider the full amount of tokens.

In a second step, the (altogether) 626 first names and their corresponding pet names were transcribed. In a third step, their average gender score was calculated. Figure 6 shows the results.

With regard to the 333 female first names, they show exactly the same gender score of the 100 most frequently used German names which is +2.9. With regard to the 293 male first names, the average gender score of -3.3 was slightly different (national average: -3.7). The difference between female and male names comprises 6.2 points. The gender score difference of the derived pet names was much lower: The average score of the female pet names was +1.0 and of the male pet names -1.0; this is a gender score difference of only 2.0 points which approximately is only a third of the official name's difference. This reduced gender score difference is visualized by the dotted and bold printed frames in Figure 6.

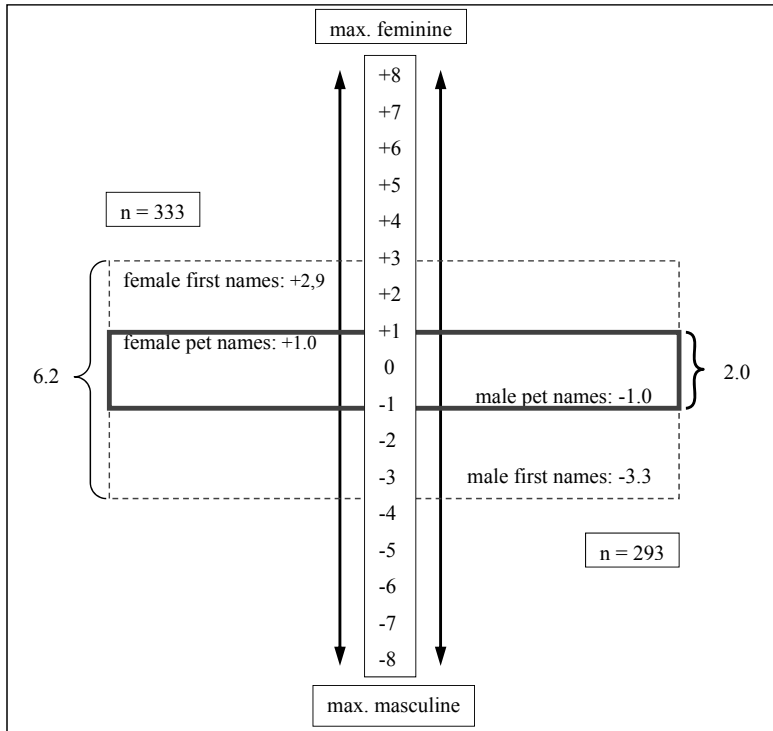


Figure 6. Average gender score of 333 female and 293 male first names and their corresponding pet names (Naumann-corpus).

Before we try to answer the question how this obvious de-gendering of pet names can be explained, we first take a look at some formal aspects in order to understand which features are responsible for this considerable difference. The two most important strategies of formal reduction and possible modification of first names to pet names are (according to Naumann 1976):

1. The pet name consists of a part of the full name (*Gerlinde* > *Linde*, *Renate* > *Nate*, *Wolfgang* > *Wolf*, *Norbert* > *Norb*, *Birgit* > *Birgi*), including contractions (*Angela* > *Anga*, *Matthias* > *Mats*).
2. The pet name consists of a part of the full name plus a suffix or additional phonological material: *Sigrun* > *Sig-i*, *Rudolf* > *Rud-i*, *Birgit* > *Birg-e*, *Gotthard* > *Gott-e*, *Dagmar* > *Dagg-el*, *Dietmar* > *Diet-el*, *Günter* > *Günt-ex*, *Steffen* > *Steff-kus*, *Steffi* > *Steff-ka*.

The first merely reduced type leads to very masculine scores. Let us next consider some examples and their gender scores: Both, the male name

*Christoph* (-5) and the female one *Christina* (+3) result in the same pet form *Chris* – a fact which does not occur seldom; *Chris* only scores 8 points. This is a typical effect as monosyllabic forms resemble very masculine names. In sum, pure reductions lead to rather masculine values, both for girls and for boys.<sup>2</sup> Some further examples are provided, starting with female names: *Gisela* (+5) → *Gis* (-8); *Ramona* (+6) → *Ramon* (-3); *Michaela* (+7) → *Micha* (+4); *Andrea* (+6) → *Drea* (+4). Male names: *Matthias* (0) → *Mats* (-8); *Siegfried* (-4) → *Sig* (-7); *Andreas* (-3) → *Dreas* (-5). There are also some exceptions, i.e. effects into the opposite direction, e.g., *Michael* (+1) → *Micha* (+4).

The second group which adds a suffix to the short form leads to more androgynous names with values around zero. If we again take *Christoph* (-5) and *Christina* (+3), their common suffixed pet name *Chrisi* (0) reaches zero points. Further examples (girls): *Michaela* (+7) → *Michi* (+3), *Gisela* (+5) → *Gischi* (+3), *Ramona* (+6) → *Moni* (+3), *Andrea* (+6) → *Andi* (+3). Boys: *Andreas* (-3) → *Andi* (+3), *Thomas* (-5) → *Thomi* (+3), *Siegfried* (-4) → *Sigi* (+3), *Michael* (+1) → *Michi* (+3). Here, most of the de-gendering effects can be stated especially as this strategy is frequently used. The main reason for the gender convergence is that exactly the most sex-indicating final sound (-a, -e for girls, -o or consonant for boys) is replaced by hypocoristic -i, which is gender-neutral (only the writing can mark gender, above all in English or American names: <y> is most used for men, <ie> for women; see Wierzbicka 1992, s. 228). Therefore identical pet names often arise as could be already seen: *Andrea* (female), *Andreas* (male) > *Andi*; *Michaela* (female), *Michael* (male) > *Michi*. Interestingly pet names even transgress the gender border which is not accepted in official names. The following examples are documented in the sample, at first male to female: *Andreas* > *Andrea*, *Lutz* > *Luise*, *Michael* > *Michaela* – and vice versa: *Karla* > *Karl*, *Martina* > *Martin*, *Michaela* > *Michael*. It cannot be excluded that these gender changes have derogative connotations and therefore constitute nicknames. The emotional quality was not monitored in this study. Thus we can draw the conclusion that the phonological gender score of pet names is clearly more androgynous in comparison to the first names from which they are derived.

2 Most interesting is the study of Wierzbicka 1992 («Personal Names and Expressive Derivation») of American names and their modifications. Wierzbicka analyses the effects of shortening and diminution of first names: Pure reductions of male first names lead to an increase of masculinity, reductions of female first names to a decrease in femininity. The suffixation of male names by the diminutive -y, -ie reduces masculinity but increases the degree of femininity when applied to female names.

## The “semantic” gender score of pet names

It is most notable that these findings on the phonological level are confirmed by the other type of pet names, so-called semantic (or characterizing) names as they were explored for couples. Until this point this type of names was excluded because their function is completely different. Their basis consists of a common noun (sometimes with morphological derivation) with a literal meaning. Therefore, their sound does not matter. The most frequent semantic pet names such as *Schatz(i)* ‘(little) darling’, *Herz(chen)* ‘(little) heart’ etc. are mutually used as many (semi-scientific) studies prove again and again. Table 4 shows the results of an internet inquiry by the naming agency «NAMBOS naming & research» of 1002 persons.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, it is not said which pet names were predominantly used by women or men to address primarily women or men. Nr. 7, *Papa* ‘daddy’ is supposed to be exclusively used for men but the other names cannot be assigned to a special sex.

Table 4. The most frequent semantic pet names (including modifications of the first name).

position	pet name (percentage)	translation
1	Schatz (37%) Schatzi (9.6%)	} 46.6% darling, sweetie little darling
2	Hase (3.9%)	
3	Liebling (3.5%)	darling
4	Schnuckel/Schnucki (3.1%)	pookie
5	Mausi (2.8%)	little mouse
6	Bär/Bärchen/Bärli (2.2%)	(little) bear
7	Papa/Papi/Papilein (2.0%)	daddy
<b>8</b>	<b>Reduction or modification of the first name: 1.5%</b>	
9	Kleiner/Kleine/Kleines (1.7%)	kid

In sum, pet names (for partners in couples) do not display a wide variety but are rather monotonous. Nearly half (46.6 %) of the used pet names are composed of *Schatz* and *Schatzi*. Women’s and men’s use of pet names do not differ to a great extent. The internet site *Beliebte Vornamen* ([www.beliebte-vornamen.de](http://www.beliebte-vornamen.de)) comments these findings as follows:

3 Published on *Beliebte Vornamen*: [www.beliebte-vornamen.de/289-kosenamen-top-10.htm](http://www.beliebte-vornamen.de/289-kosenamen-top-10.htm) (access: 09.03.14); see also [www.nambos.de](http://www.nambos.de).

Dabei verhalten sich die **Geschlechter** relativ gleich, auffällige Unterschiede gibt es jedoch im **Generationenvergleich**: Je älter die Befragten sind, desto variantenreicher sind die Bezeichnungen. Jüngere sind wenig einfallsreich, “begnügen” sich mit den gängigen Kosenamen: 63% der unter 30jährigen nennen ihren Partner schlicht “Schatz” oder “Schatzi”.

[The sexes behave relatively similar, only intergenerational comparison reveals peculiar differences: The older the interviewees, the more variation within the names. Younger people are less inventive, the content themselves with the popular pet names: 63% of the people under 30 years call their partner simply “darling” or “sweetie”.]

Relating to our topic, semantic pet names perfectly confirm what we found out about the phonological structure of pet names created from first names: Gender seems to be rather irrelevant, it is overruled by another, obviously more important social information, i.e. close relationship or intimacy. In these contexts, where women and men have the closest relation, is gender dramatically down-graded. This certainly also holds for other pet names, such as those for children and between friends. As these names are not yet sufficiently examined, we don't have any robust results.

### Conclusion

German first names are obliged to mark gender on their surface. Unisex names are not accepted (only under very specific conditions, see Schmidt-Jüngst 2014), and the phonological distance between male and female names can be measured by a phonological gender score which was presented here for the first time. Although the concrete way to determine the gender score surely has to be refined, a first proposal inspired by Barry & Harper (1995, 1998) was presented for German first names. If we use the same calculation formula for pet names which are derived from first names, it becomes obvious that gender is down-graded: The phonological distance between female and male pet names comprises only a third of the official first name's distance. Even on the semantic level, male and female characterizing pet names show a strong tendency to androgyny.

There are at least two explanations for these rather surprising results. Firstly, pet names are used to address a person which is present and part of the communicational exchange; pet names usually do not refer to absent persons



because they establish a close relationship between two partners, friends or family members. In this situation, gender is visible, gender is obvious. We therefore do not need to mark gender on the name itself. This functional explanation holds for the personal pronouns as well: the first and second person singular (*ich* 'I', *du* 'you') and plural (*wir* 'we', *ihr* 'you') never mark gender, it is not necessary. If we however refer to absent persons, we have to mark their gender, at least in der third person singular: *sie* 'she', *er* 'he'. This corresponds to the use of official first names.

Secondly, there is a sociological explanation: As Hirschauer (2013) points out, the social gender category undergoes periods of boom and regression during a lifetime. Doing gender is most important before coupling because gender helps reducing complexity and selecting the partner. After coupling, however, gender may prevent a close relationship because the individuality of the partner is of greater importance. If an interpersonal relation is supposed to be stable, two individuals have to complement each other as they have to master everyday life. In well-established relationships, gender is therefore neglected or even disregarded. Within a stable relationship undoing gender often is observed which is reflected on different levels: on clothing and outfit, behavior, attitudes, and, last but not least, on pet names. Hirschauer (2013 s. 41) writes:

[Die Zweierbeziehung ist] als Individualisierungsmotor ein entscheidender Ort der Entfaltung von Geschlechtsindifferenz [...]: Genau jene Beziehungen, die sich aufgrund der Geschlechterunterscheidung bilden, brauchen eigene [...] Formen der Absehung von Geschlecht, um maximal persönliche Beziehungen sein zu können.

[As a motor of individualization, [the relationship in between two people in a couple] is a key place for the evolvment of *indifference* between genders [...]: Just those relationships that evolve because of a difference between genders, are in need of some [...] ways of downgrading gender in order to be able to have maximally personal relationships.]

This explains why pet names do not have to be gendered: If two (or more) persons live together and know themselves very well individually, this is much more important than gender. The described gender downgrading does not only hold for pet names used by couples, it rather characterizes every close interpersonal relationship.

## References

- Alford, Richard, 1988: *Naming and Identity: A Cross-Cultural Study of Personal Naming Practices*. New Haven: HRAF.
- Barry, Herbert & Harper, Aylene, 1995: Increased choice of female phonetic attributes in first names. In: *Sex Roles* 32, 11/12. pp. 809–819.
- 1998: Phonetic differentiation between first names of boys and girls. In: *Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Onomastic Sciences*, vol. 3. *Scope, Perspectives and Methods of Onomastics*. Ed. by Wilhelm Nicolaisen. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen. pp. 40–46.
- Debus, Friedhelm, 1985: Zur Pragmatik von Namengebung und Namensgebrauch in unserer Zeit. In: *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 29. pp. 305–343.
- Gerhards, Jürgen, 2003: *Die Moderne und ihre Vornamen*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Hirschauer, Stefan, 2013: Geschlechts(in)differenz in geschlechts(un)gleichen Paaren. Zur Geschlechterunterscheidung in intimen Beziehungen. In: *Gender. Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*. pp. 37–56.
- Beliebte Vornamen: <http://www.beliebte-vornamen.de>
- Kleinteich, Bernd, 1992: *Die Vornamen in der DDR 1960–1990*. Berlin: Akademieverlag.
- Lieberson, Stanley & Mikelson, Kelly, 1985: Distinctive African American names: An experimental, historical, and linguistic analysis of innovation. In: *American Sociological Review* 60/1. pp. 928–946.
- Naumann, Horst, 1976: Vorname – Rufname – Übername. In: *Namenkundliche Informationen* 29. pp. 1–25.
- Nübling, Damaris, 2009: Von *Monika* zu *Mia*, von *Norbert* zu *Noah*: Zur Androgynisierung der Rufnamen seit 1945 aus prosodisch-phonologischer Perspektive. In: *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 44. pp. 67–110.
- 2012: Von *Elisabeth* zu *Lilly*, von *Klaus* zu *Nico*: Zur Androgynisierung und Infantilisierung der Rufnamen von 1945 bis heute. In: *Genderlinguistik. Sprachliche Konstruktionen von Geschlechtsidentität*. Eds: Susanne Günthner, Dagmar Hüpper & Constanze Spieß. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter. pp. 319–357.
- 2014: Emotionalität in Namen. Spitznamen, Kosennamen, Spottnamen – und ihr gender-nivellierender Effekt. In: *Emotionalität im Text*. Ed. by: Lenka Vaňková. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag. pp. 103–122.

Oelkers, Susanne (2003): Naming Gender. Empirische Untersuchungen zur phonologischen Struktur von Vornamen im Deutschen. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Schmidt-Jüngst, Miriam (2014): Von der Öffnung der Zweigeschlechtlichkeit zur Öffnung des Namenrechts? To appear in: *Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica* 31. pp. 111–113.

— (this volume): Constructing Gender Identity: Naming Choices Of Transgender People in Germany.

Wierzbicka, Anna, 1992: Personal Names and Expressive Derivation. In: *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition. Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations*. Ed. by Anna Wierzbicka. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 225–307.

## Summary

DAMARIS NÜBLING

### *The phonetic gender score of German first names and pet names. Gendered first names versus de-gendered pet names*

In German, female and male first names are strictly segregated: there are two big inventories with the only purpose to separate women and men. Unisex names are extremely seldom. If they are chosen, they have to be followed by a sex-specific middle name (e.g. *Kim Uwe*, *Kim Annette*). If we look at the phonological components of first names, i.e. at their sounds, we can state that male and female names became more similar over the last decades. Whereas in the 1950's, typical first names such as *Katharina* and *Rolf* diverged considering their phonic inventory considerably, today, many girls are named *Leah* and *Lara* and many boys *Noah* and *Luca*. These names share nearly the same sounds, they consist of two syllables and are stressed on the first one. If we look behind the scenes, it becomes clear that the officially required onomastic separation of the two sexes is undermined. In this paper, I will present a so-called phonetic gender score for German first names for the first time (see also Schmidt-Jüngst in this volume). It allows for measuring a degree of femaleness and maleness of names. In a second step, it will be asked whether unofficial names such as pet names, which are not obliged to mark sex also tend to be gendered or if they disobey the gender barrier. It will be shown that the most intimate names are not interested in stressing the denoted person's sex. In contrast to first names, pet names tend to be maximally de-gendered.

**Keywords:** gender onomastics, gender linguistics, first names, phonological gender score, phonology

**Schlüsselwörter:** Gender-Onomastik, Gender-Linguistik, Rufnamen, phonologischer Gender-Index, Phonologie