Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics

Volume 5, Number 2

Edited by Patricia Hamel and Ronald Schaefer

The editors would like to thank the faculty and staff for their invaluable assistance in the preparation of this volume. Funding for this journal is provided by the Graduate Student Council from the Activity Fee.

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Abstract: Does an individual's personal name affect his self-perception or the way that others perceive him? A survey of some literature and research studies examining the psychodynamics of names and naming practices provides several interesting minor points on the subject, but major generalizations will remain elusive and indistinct so long as religious, economic, and physical factors are essentially inseparable from the naming process.

Personal names are but a small part of the larger classification of lexical items popularly called names. The actual properties of personal names (PHN)—phonological (sound), pragmatic (usage), and semantic (meaning)—have fascinated and confounded poets, logicians, and linguists alike since early times.

According to Garnot's (1949) examination of the ancient TEXTS OF THE PYRAMIDS, even before 2000 B.C. belief in the power of the proper name to determine the behavior and the destiny of its possessor was commonly held. (Bender 1963, p. 1)

Some version of this belief can be identified in most social groups. In fact, there are few societies, mostly "primitive communities where everyone knows everyone else" whose members "do not heed surnames. There are only personal names." (Hughes 1999, p. 7)

Very few tribes have been discovered that exist without some sort of personal appellation, although certain aborigines in Australia have been found to be without personal names; Herodotus and Pliny record that the Askantes in Africa did not have proper names. (Smith 1950, p. 176)

The Ashanti of Ghana name their children according to the day of their birth. "Ekuku" is a child born on Wednesday. He is said to be quick-tempered and aggressive. On the other hand, "Ekado," a Monday child, is said to be quiet, peaceful, and retiring. In 1954, Gustav Jakobs, a psychiatrist, checked juvenile court records to confirm or disprove the rumor that a majority of crimes were committed by "Ekuku" children. The results supported the rumor, a fact which Jakobs attributed to expectations and upbringing or environment. (Marcus 1976, p. 158) However, before making any definite correlation between the ambiguity/clarity of the name and the strength of its effect upon personality development, more investigation should be conducted to

determine if names with a more "ambiguous" literal meaning are characteristic of larger, heterogenous societies and if names with definite, literal meanings are characteristic of smaller, homogenous societies.

Therefore, Ph-giving may not be a "universal" practice, but it seems to occur with enough regularity of form and incidence to make some "semi-spiritual" observations about the phenomenon. Such observations, in conjunction with the findings of psychologists and other interested social scientists, might thereby shed light on the modern-day magic exerted by personal names, the linguistic item many most closely associate with the individual. Does the name one is given affect one's self-perception? If so, to what extent? Does the beginning of a person's instruction about himself begin even prior to the onset of language, indeed with the bestowal of his personal name?

A person's name was regarded as the substance of his breath, even the word psyche, "soul," is derived from πνεῦμα, "to blow." The ancient Semitic name for the gods is the same as that for "breath" or "spirit"; and in most languages name, breath, and soul are so closely allied that they undoubtedly mean "animal" or "souls" originally. (Brown 1934, p. 21)

This close association between self and name may account, to a large extent, for the relatively recent efforts of feminists to symbolize their personal and social liberation by retaining their maiden names following marriage. Similarly, the adoption of a "stage-name" by a would-be actor or actress, or the taking of a "holy-name" by a religious novice, may be an external action representing some sort of internal change—a statement by the individual to signify a modification of his own spiritual being. This is done in the belief that people may perceive him differently or he may act differently if he bears a different name. Perhaps it is also this close name/self proximity in the minds of many people which prompts them to write their names on walls as a perpetuation of their existence in that spot. (Smith 1950, p. 246)

Both a possessiveness of and a curiosity about Phs have been documented in other cultures. It is taboo to ask a Kayapo Indian of central Brazil his name, nor do individuals speak their own names. (Sumberger 1974) To mention a Yanomamö's name publicly is a grave insult, and privately, he never whispers the names of his parents, those who may provide him with a wife, or the dead, for "a desired thing will disappear...the name of a feared thing will literally invoke its presence." (Lisot 1973) Even among the Shona speakers of southern Africa, a proverb states: Bita ko lehe ke seromo. (Literally: A bad name is ominous.) (Mehou 1972, p. 271) Beyond its narrow cultural context, this concept might be generalized to curses and insults, arguments and duals, even wars, which have been initiated to blacken another's name or to defend one's own name, for attacking a person's name is synonymous to attacking the person himself.
Is this belief, however, more characteristic of primitive societies and only peripherally descriptive of highly-developed societies? No evidence was found in researching this paper that the average American attributes any magical properties to FN's. Psychologists, on the other hand, have established enough data on the subject to indicate that certain psychodynamic forces operate with regard to FN's. Therefore, by simply redefining the term "magical" to mean "any mysterious, seemingly inexplicable, or extraordinary power or influence," (Goralnik 1972, pp. 850-1) names can be said to be magical even in modern social situations.

It is this "magical" quality of names which in turn affects one's self-perception. Zilbur G. Gaffney (1971, p. 34) extended himself far beyond any point supportable by this paper when he wrote his First Law of Nomenclature: "Your career is determined by your character; and your character, in turn, is determined, perhaps unwittingly by the name under which you grew to adulthood." His observation, however extreme, bears investigation in light of available research data.

Generally, those experiments examined fall into the categories of FN preference, FN stereotyping, and FN expectancy. Lawson (1973 and 1974), in two separate studies of the semantic differentiation of men and women's first names, found that FN's are subject to value computations and stereotyping and that men and women tend to agree in their evaluations of names. Using Gogwood's three basic dimensions of meaning (evaluation, potency, and activity), Lawson concluded that short names (e.g., Dan, Dave, Jim, etc.) are preferred by both men and women over first names (e.g., Daniel, David, James, etc.) and nicknames (e.g., Danny, Davey, Jimmy, etc.)--forms of the same FN's. In fact, nicknames were consistently ranked closer to Bad, Weak, and Passive in the value judgments, indicating that there are consistent stereotypes associated with nicknames. The study of women's names was less conclusive regarding stereotypes and preferences; however, Lawson (1974) attributed these results to the fact that women's names shift more in popularity, causing a greater variety of women's names.

Lawson's subjects were college students, but studies with grade school children show that they too possess stereotypes feelings about names and that these stereotypes can affect school success and achievement. Psychologists John Schvivod and Herbert Harari (Marcus 1976) found "best liked" names defined by four youth groups turned up time after time among the children cited as being "most popular" a month later. Similarly, the "least liked" names correlated with the "least popular" students. Their conclusion was that a person's name alone has a powerful influence on his/her popularity. In another study, S. Gary Gogwood (1977, p. 23), an educational psychologist at Tulane University, determined that boys with names previously identified as "undesirable" had lower levels of adjustment, lower expectations, lower self-concepts, and lower achievement in school. None of these studies proves that names guarantee fame or insure nervousness. In fact, psychologist Richard Seidensztein (1978, p. 57) offered evidence that under certain circumstances an uncommon or less desirable name might be advantageous. His study, correlating over 200 uncommon names culled from the Social register, along with their frequency of occurrence in Who's Who, indicated that an uncommon name is a "boost" if one is also male and upper-class.
Sex and social class aside, the influence of names as a positive or negative effect upon how one sees one's self should not be overlooked.

The literal meaning of a PN and the expectancy its sound creates in the hearer's mind are virtually beyond the bearer's control. The literal meanings of most English PNs have been buried deeply in time and linguistic change. Background readings on the various hypothetical meanings and/or definitions of PNs by logicians and linguists were wholly uninformative, if not confusing. It was determined, for the sake of this paper, to accept none of the specific PN definitions, but to look at the total environment within which the PN is used and understood. Farhang Zadeh (1968, p. 74), in defining this environment, stated:

one must always distinguish (A) the meaning of proper name, i.e., the constant and salient feature which may be described as a property of being used to make a unique reference to the same entity and thereby to individuate the bearer so that it could be amenable to description, evaluation, registration, nomination etc., (B) the bearer of the name, which could exist in various ontological domains, (C) the unique properties of the bearer, and (D) the connotation of a name, i.e., the accidental feature of association of a name with its bearer which the bearer may make upon hearing that name.

This pragmatic approach includes the importance of listener expectancy, factor (B), in the semantic formation of PNs, a factor also cited in psychological studies as being significant in the development of positive or negative self-perception.

The characteristics attached to name stereotypes define the way bearers of the name are expected by others to behave. Since people often behave as they are expected to behave, these expectations may become self-fulfilling prophecies—Harvard psychologist Robert Rosenthal calls this phenomenon the Pygmalion effect (Marcus 1976, p. 76). In his now classic study, Rosenthal randomly selected 20 of a given group of students and labeled them "intellectual bloomers." Based solely on this variable, the "bloomers" did, in fact, show significant gains which could only be attributed to teacher expectancy. Success became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In a similar manner, Herbert Batari experimented with a group of 80 elementary teachers who were asked to grade eight essays of identical quality. The only difference in the essays was the name each bore—either a positive name (Michael, David, Karen, or Lisa) or a negative name (Elmer, Hubert, Bertha, or Adelle). "Michael" and "David" essays scored a full letter above "Elmer" and "Hubert" essays. Karen and "Lisa" essays were a letter and a half better than "Bertha" essays. "Adelle" was not far behind. The results were definite enough for Batari to postulate that teachers expect less from certain names, causing failure to become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Arum 1976).
Therefore, PNs bear an expectancy factor independent of the bearer himself, and depending on the PN in question, essentially beyond the bearer's control. Studies generally show that common short names will elicit positive expectations and uncommon longer names will elicit negative expectations. Whether or not these expectations actually fulfill themselves is a complex process which may never be unraveled, but to get a clearer picture of the process, the expectancy initiated by the name-giver should also be considered.

Although there are ad hoc conventions for giving PNs to various individuals, there are (in American society, at least) no general rules governing the activity. These name-giving clauses often transcend cultural boundaries; therefore, it is impossible to label them uniquely "American." Names are given:

1. To honor another person, such as from given name of parent, grandparent, or more distant ancestor.

2. In admiration of a famous personage, such as a political figure, sovereign, military personage, religious character, poet, writer, musical celebrity, radio-television-screen star, fictitious character.

3. Because it is "pretty", or seems to be harmonious with the surname, such as /gama/ from a Marathi surname to accompany another surname /manokar/ (Junghare, 1975, p. 35), or even a "pleasant" nickname like Jack or Betty.

4. From some event or circumstance of birth, such as place (Arizona, Utah, Kent), time (Decal, June, Tuesday), number (Enough, Finis, Omega, Wemonah meaning "first"), being twins (Avery and Ivory) or triplets (Faith, Hope, Charity), or some event happening on or near the day of birth (Pearl Harbor).

5. From some hope or aspiration on the part of the parents, such as Grace.

6. Descriptive of the child, such as Blanche (white) and Maureen (dark) referring to complexion, Flavia (yellow) and Rufus (red-haired) referring to the color of hair, or Vaughn and Paul (small) referring to size or stature.

7. From an object, flower or plant, jewel or gem, animal or insect, weapon, emblem, or modern term, such as /kindra/ meaning "rag" and /punja/ meaning "heap of dirt" (Junghare 1975, p. 32).

8. Because of association or relation with a surname, showing humor (Sea Hogg), repetition of the family name (Bruce Bruce), alliteration (Sherley Chadwick), and sound or rhyme (Peter Streetter and Percy Harvey).

9. From error or ignorance, such as medical terms (Vagina, Stippur), misspelled words, and odd pronunciations (Libertine for Liberty).

10. Theories, such as giving a name associated with the opposite sex (a boy named Sue or Mary), a pet name (Fritter), a name
composed of single letters (LB or OF), or an unusually long or short name (EX).

11. As the result of chance or random selection.

12. By way of example, such as changing the spelling of an ordinary name (Ethyl for Ethel) or spelling a sound without meaning (Cona or Iale).

These general name-giving classes (Smith 1970, pp. 20-22) may not only be considered singly, but may also be combined, resulting in multiply-determined name choices. Obviously, the resulting expectations may be as infinite and varied as the reasons behind the choice. However, the choice, whatever it is, will be reflective of the general environment in which the child will be raised. Brender (1963, p. 9) adds:

the same motives or attitudes, or configurations of motives and attitudes, will persist in time and will be found to underlie the choice of the names of all children in a given family unit.

Where the motives or attitudes behind the selection of a name are found to vary from time to time and, hence, from child to child in a particular family, it is hypothesized that this will be a manifestation of the occurrence of some personality change in one or both parents, or an expression of a significant change in the relations between the parents.

Thus, names start to do something—express a hope, commemorate a likeness, etc.—yet the extent to which the name-giver's expectation(s) may affect the development of the bearer's self-image will largely depend upon the importance the giver attaches to the reasons behind the choice.

Withcombe (1940) reports that "Foundlings were obvious subjects for the ingenuity of Puritan ministers, and they were freely given such names as 'Helpless,' 'Lament,' 'Misericordia,' 'Adulterina'..." It would seem the more "obvious" the name is to the giver and the bearer—that is, the more apparent the literal meaning is or the more conscious the reasons for the selection are—the greater the personality of the bearer will be affected.

With regard to the relative "consciousness" of the name-giving act, giving the child his father's name, the "Hamlet hypothesis," represents a fairly straight-forward motive. Robert Plank (1971) found possible negative ramifications to the practice, however. He found that "juniors" were twice as frequent among a list of neuro-psychiatric patients at a Veterans hospital as among a list of general medical patients. And in a second study of applicants for outpatient psychiatric care, "juniors" comprised 28 of 285 total names, 10 per cent or three times as high as the number of "juniors" estimated in the general population. This is not to say that this very common practice creates a higher percentage of
neurotic, ineffective sons. The fact that the first three men to set foot on the moon are all "juniors" should show that the result can be either case. Psychologists do postulate, however, that a parent who is strongly motivated enough to heave his son with his own name may exhibit other overbearing tendencies as he raises the child. And the child, in attempting to establish his own identity, separate from his father's, may react by becoming a super-achiever or by completely giving up. (One name encountered recently, Molesta Galloway, Jr., makes me wonder if there is any hope for this individual.)

After reviewing some of the available research on the psychodynamics of names and naming, few new conclusions can be reached. Certain studies can be advantageous to both students and teachers by making them aware of the stereotypes associated with certain names and the tendency to fulfill expectations of failure or success depending on one's positive or negative perception of a name. Prospective parents may also be advised of the possible pitfalls their child may suffer because of his parents' decision to be creative or innovative or somehow distinctive in their naming choices. Also, studies such as those examining the "junior" phenomenon may sensitize parents to their conscious or subconscious desire to fulfill personal expectations via their children.

The practical applications are, therefore, varied and far-reaching, but, as more research is completed, the practical applications will become more obvious and definitive.

Yet universal or semi-universal statements are still difficult to formulate and support, in light of the present stage of research. Religious, economic, and physical factors are densely intermingled in the naming process, to the extent that it is still very difficult, if not impossible, to separate the individual and his motivations from closely related cultural and environmental ones. Until the closed doors of individual cognition are opened and exposed spaces explored, the effects of names and naming processes will remain an undefined maze, clouded by expectations and value judgments hidden in the minds of the bearers and givers, and regulated by ambiguous meanings and cultural traditions lost in the depths of history.

This argument is decidedly obtuse and essentially esoteric; however, the present level of research does not allow one to be more succinct. Several relevant questions have been raised, for example, to what extent is the name-giving process a social structuring tool of a given culture? And from this same idea, can language then be said to structure culture, or vice versa? Indeed, are the really linguistic items in the same sense as other parts of speech, considering their lack of adherence to general grammatical and syntactical rules? And finally, if cognition is hierarchically ordered, is it also cyclically organized? That is, does the freedom or arbitrariness of naming practices accepted within the society correlate with the amount of freedom the individual experiences in the society? Does the highly structured society, which depends on the full participation of each member, thereby sacrifice his individual identity for the sake of a less unique social identity? If so, one could hypothesize that the naming processes of such a society
would be a definite tool used to keep its members in their "proper" places. Probably the meanings of names (literal) would be much more apparent, to both bearer and giver; perhaps the rules governing name-giving would also be more conventional—requirements rather than options. Any associated expectations would probably have a greater effect on the individual's self-perception, a very effective socializing mechanism.

In more complex social groups (in the sense that the individual's constant participation is not required for the success of the social structure, e.g., America), the name-giving process may achieve or closely approximate the creative quality having had initially when it was totally arbitrary, subject only to the name-giver's whim. In giving PNs, at least, the giver is affected by other outside forces no more or no less than he himself is affected by these forces in his own life. The choice the giver makes will essentially reflect the giver's own creativity (individuality) or conformity within the social structure.

Names and naming processes are still a complicated, misunderstood maze; but gradually, as more research is done, we shall learn whether names are primarily a cognitive, individual process or a social, group process. But at this time, a person will probably find less of himself and more of others as he meanders through the name maze.
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