

ON THE CURRENT PERCEPTION OF PROPER NAMES

CLAUDIA PISOSCHI
University of Craiova, Romania

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the way in which Romanian young people with an allegedly high level of education perceive their Christian names and analyses the results of a questionnaire administered to a group of over 50 Romanian students. The questionnaire dealt with semantic and pragmatic aspects. The former category includes: the nature of the motivation involved in choosing a certain name/a set of proper names; the relation proper name (and its features) – current referent who bears the name (and his/her features). The latter category refers to the preference for a certain name or variant of the name (hypocoristic forms included) and to the association of two or more Christian names in order to satisfy both traditional culture-specific requirements and modern tendencies. The conclusions are interpreted in connection with the specificity of the subjects, and can be further checked against a larger and more heterogeneous target group.

Keywords: proper name, motivation, etymology, hypocoristic, referent.

Introduction

Main objectives

Initially, the basic purpose of our study was to assess the consequences of the contact between Romanian and English with regard to proper names. More precisely, we focused our attention on the young generations' tendency to use English variants of anthroponyms (including their short forms) and nicknames. But since this phenomenon should be studied against the complex network of semantic and pragmatic reasons which underlie the choice of a proper name and since our findings did not fully match our expectations in point of the influence of English, we extended our area of interest to study the general process of proper name selection, perception and interpretation.

Time is a key factor in this respect and an accurate synchronic analysis as the one intended by us cannot overlook the role of diachrony, as far as proper names are concerned, since they survive and evolve in time. Users' awareness is another key element which goes hand in hand with their competence and motivation.

The general theoretical frame which is the background for this study was presented in a previous paper (Pisoschi 2011)¹. The references given at the end of this paper represent

¹ Claudia Pisoschi. 2011. Theoretical Considerations on the Time and Space 'Journey' of Some

the background sources that inspired our questionnaire design and the analysis of the results. The major theoretical aspects considered are: the asserted or presupposed lexical meaning of proper names (Van Langendonck 2007); their increased opacity, sometimes reaching the level of semantic bleaching, (inversely?) proportional to their prototypical character (Anderson 2007); the cancellation of the sortal presupposition implying the feature of gender; the process of turning proprial lemmas into diminutives, which become in their turn autonomous proprial lemmas (Van Langendonck 2007).

In this light, our specific objectives were to determine:

1. which factors prevail in choosing a proper name;
2. the total/partial reflection of the users' beliefs and competences (related to name use) in practice;
3. the mixture of awareness and unawareness in name selection and use, a characteristic linked to the previous aspect (culture-specific beliefs and lack of competence might lead to a rather superficial view on the matter);
4. the truth or falsehood of the assumed opposition tradition – modernity/fashionability;
5. the gap between older and younger generations in relation to name selection, perception and interpretation. The results studied correspond entirely to the perspective of the young generation: we are interested in what they, as main average users of proper names, assume to be the reasons behind name selection. Moreover, they are the generation in full contact with the English language; nevertheless, they might not have direct access to the correct sources and, even if they do, the factors discussed under 2 and 3 could block the correct (understanding of the) information.

Method used

Since the topic of the paper is mainly pragmatic in nature and the theoretical frames setting the perspective of analysis have been previously discussed, as mentioned above, we considered that the best method to be used in order to assess the users' selection, perception and interpretation of proper names would be the questionnaire method. Therefore, our study consists in the interpretation of the results of a questionnaire administered to a group of around 50 students (56), 21 men and 35 women.

Any comment on the results should have in view the specificity of the targeted group: from this perspective, the group was homogeneous in point of age, since the respondents are in their twenties; also their instruction level is homogeneous, too, i.e. they are all students, which would lead to the conclusion that they have or should have rather similar encyclopedic knowledge. However, it should be pointed out that about a third of them are not specialized in Philology, therefore, their linguistic knowledge might have influenced their understanding of the questions and, as a result of that, their answers. The target group was intentionally non-homogeneous with regard to their gender, and some questions might be given biased answers, because of gender specificity regarding the domains of interest.

We list the questions below:

Anglo-Saxon Proper Names. In "Numele și Numirea". *Actele Conferinței Internaționale de Onomastică, ediția I: "Interferențe multietnice în antroponimie"*, O. Felecan (ed.), 515–526. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega.

1. What is your first name? Do you know its meaning? Do you know its origin?
2. Who chose it? What was the reason for choosing it?
3. Do you have a middle name? Why was it chosen?
4. Which name do you prefer and why?
5. Do you have a nickname? How did it appear?
6. Do you prefer to be called by a hypocoristic form? Do others prefer to call you that?
7. What are the first (and middle) names of your parents? Do you like those names? Why?
8. What would be the reasons for choosing a name for a baby?
9. What about a name for your pet? Would you apply the same criteria?

The order of the questions was established considering the following aspects: the focus was on the perception of names, therefore all the questions were subject-centered, the first having a rather objective character, and the others containing various degrees of subjectivity. The first six questions regard the subject as an autonomous entity, but predominantly passive, being the beneficiary of the process of naming him/her by using names, nicknames or hypocoristics. It is interesting to notice whether and to what extent the first and middle name share the same function, their distinct role causing the tendency or even the necessity of their simultaneous presence. The subject's acceptance or rejection of his/her first (and middle) name might lead to the appearance of nicknames or hypocoristics, sometimes replacing the 'official' names. However, we do not think that the subject can become totally active in this respect, i.e. he/she cannot force the others to use one name or another when addressing him/her.

The last three questions consider the subject in diachrony and focus on him/her as an active element, as a source providing names for animate [+/- human] referents that he/she is implicitly attached to.

The comments on the answers were organized by grouping the questions according to the aspects reflected: mainly semantic or pragmatic. The headings and subheadings will reflect those concerns.

Semantic aspects

The semantic nature of the motivation involved in choosing a certain name/a set of proper names

This aspect is reflected by the first question of the questionnaire:

What is your first name? Do you know its meaning? Do you know its origin?

The etymology of the name remains a semantic criterion as long as the user is fully aware of it: it can be the true etymology or a false one; on the other hand, some names can have a multiple or unknown etymology which makes their adequate interpretation harder or even impossible. Meaning and origin are two distinct aspects, the former obviously more salient than the latter, but we considered them as components of the same question since if

one knows the meaning of his/her first name, then chances are he/she will also remember the language in which the common noun which became a proper name has that meaning. Only 1 female respondent mentioned the origin of her name (*Larisa*, a Latin name in her view) without saying anything about the meaning, whereas 5 gave the meaning presumably associated to their name without mentioning their origin.

Subjects' gender	Meaning		Etymology	
	Mentioned	Unknown		Mentioned
Male subjects sum total (21)	15	6	6	15
Female subjects sum total (35)	17 +6	12	13 +2	20

The answers to this question illustrated their gender-dependency in a way contrary to our expectations: 15 out of 21 male respondents mentioned the meaning of their name and 6 of them also mentioned their origin²; 23 out of 35 female respondents mentioned the meaning of their names, including here the simple mentioning of a religious significance associated to the name (6). 17 female respondents gave the meaning of their names, 15 including their origin³: 13 female respondents mentioned the origin of their first names (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French) and other 2 implicitly referred to it (one by mentioning the filiation of the famous name bearer – *Lavinia*, the daughter of *Latinus*, the king of Latium, the other deriving her name, *Lia*, from the Romanian name *Ilie*).

Referring to the religious significance of their name, some respondents apparently mistook the significance of the name for the significance of the most representative bearer in Christian religion, but that is a proof of the prevailing role played by the causal theory of naming in accounting for name use; wishful thinking regarding the baby whose name is chosen is reflected in the association of a name to a significant bearer whose life made him/her a role model to people: 6 women respondents and only 2 male respondents associated their name to famous fore-bearers: *Maria* (Virgin Mary's name)⁴, *Mihaela* (of religious origin, without any other detail mentioned), *Nicoleta* < *St. Nicholas*, *Cristina* < *Christ*), *Andra* < *St. Andrew*; *Remus* – one of the twin brothers considered the mythical founders of Rome – and *Cristian* derived from *Jesus Christ*.

In spite of the inherent sociolinguistic aspects considered, our interest was not to assess to what extent the name meanings mentioned by the students corresponded to reality⁵. What is relevant to our analysis is that they were interested in finding out details on

² The respondents identified two Latin names (*Marius*, *Ovidiu*), one Slavic name (*Radu*), one Greek name (*Darius*), two Hebrew names (*Mihai*, *Gabriel*).

³ The list of names whose meanings were given is: *Roxana* 'sunrise', 'shiny', 'breaking dawn' (two female respondents bear that name), *Mihaela* (Hebr. *Mikaela* 'he who is like God'), *Bianca* (Fr. 'white'), *Oana* (Hebr. *Jochanna* 'God's blessing'), *Maria* (Latin, 'bitter'), *Irina* (Gr. 'peace'), *Mirela* (Fr. 'to admire'), *Delia* (Gr. *Delos*), *Elena* (Gr. 'ray of light'), *Cristina* 'follower of Christ', *Felicia* (Gr. 'happiness'), *Lorena* (Gr. 'laurel'), *Alexandra* 'God's chosen one', *Sorina* 'sunny', *Ramona* (Gr. 'warrior'), *Ionela* (Hebr. *Johanna* 'blessed by God'). Generally, those who mentioned the meaning of the name also knew its origin.

⁴ Two respondents bearing that name made the connection between their name and Virgin Mary.

⁵ The list of names whose meanings were given is: *Marius* 'warrior', *Ovidiu* 'shepherd', *Radu* 'the

their names and they made inquiries in that direction, which might be somehow surprising considering their gender and professional domain; their interest can reflect their belief in the influence of the name on the bearer, in the necessity of a full compatibility between the two, the name being believed by some to have the power to mold the identity of the referent.

The relation proper name (and its features) – current referent who bears the name (and his/her features)

What would be the reasons for choosing a name for a baby?

Subjects' gender	Semantic criterion	Pragmatic criterion (the subjects' attitude)			Name features (features attached to its meaning or form)	No involvement at present (both spouses will decide or no answer is given) – opting out of the maxim of relevance
		Features of previous referents bearing the name				
		Role models		Tradition (religion + continuity)		
		Real	Fictional			
Male subjects (21)	6	4+1 ¹	3	8+3 ²	2 ³	1+1
Female subjects (35)	4	4	1 ⁴	4+ 2	31	5+ 1

¹ The second term of the sum represents the cases when the respondents proposed two names for babies.

² The second term of the sum represents the cases when the respondents proposed two names for babies.

³ One of the two answers recorded combines pragmatic and semantic criteria – Eric [+strong].

⁴ From mythology.

The semantic criterion led to the following conclusions in the case of male respondents:

- 11 out of 21 male respondents gave no name as an example, 10 of them listed names.
- 6 out of 21 linked the choice of a future baby's name to the semantic criterion: 3 respondents enumerated a proper name depending on baby gender: one gave traditional Romanian names/variants of names – *Oana* 'gift from God' and *Radu* 'happiness' – and other two respondents listed Hebrew names: they chose the same name for a boy, *David* (whose meaning 'loved' is given, one of the two respondents adding that he wishes to have a son) and *Rebeca* ('splendor') as a girl name. Another respondent gave a list⁶ which reflects a deep thinking about the issue and presumably hides a subjective attitude regarding the personality of the referent having the name which impressed him. We inferred that because the meaning of the names is not mentioned, but the subject seems very determined as far as his choice is concerned. He associates some features of character specific to the referents he

happy one', *Adrian* 'happiness' (or the toponym *Hadria*, a town in northern Italy which gave its name to the Adriatic Sea, too), *Adelin* 'gentle', *Andrei* 'brave', *Oliviu* 'olive', *Mihai* 'resembling God', *Cosmin* 'universe, decency', *Gabriel* 'God is powerful', *Darius* 'the one who upholds the Good/the state of well-being'.

⁶ *Andreea, Radu, Violeta, Mihai.*

knows with the names themselves. Therefore, those features of the referent become part of the name meaning in his view. Sometimes both semantic and pragmatic criteria are considered, 1 respondent giving *Vlad* as his choice for a baby boy name because of its meaning 'a domni' ('to rule, to reign'), whereas for a baby girl the criterion is pragmatic (the girl should have two names: the name of a saint patron and his own name).

With female respondents, only 4 respondents out of 35 gave examples of names, 3 of which gave both female and male names, half of them being less common and perceived as foreign (*Rebeca, Robi, Mario, Sara*). 10 respondents consider meaning is relevant for choosing a baby's name and 2 other respondents would use that as argument for choosing the baby's middle name. In this case, meaning is identified with traditional names. Two respondents refer to the importance of meaning to avoid confusions or the future embarrassment of the baby.

Discussing the pragmatic reasons, it is clear that they reflect the subject's favorable, reverential attitude regarding a certain referent, i.e. a predecessor bearing the name (he/she is relevant to the subject and/or his/her community).

These are our conclusions regarding male respondents:

- 1 respondent associated the name to two compulsory features in his view: [+special], [+not shaming the child];

- only 1 respondent strictly referred to the features of the name itself [+not that common]: *Maya, Mateo*⁷;

- 8 respondents expressed their attitude towards a referent considered as a role-model: it can be a contemporary referent, 'people that we liked the most in our life' (2), famous people belonging to the respondent's area of interest – rock stars, musicians (2) –, fictional characters (3)⁸. We should mention the attitude of 1 respondent who intends to give his children names taken from Greek mythology, as he bears two such names himself; he not only accepts his given names without reserve, but is totally compatible with them, shares his parents' outlook on the matter and intends to pass it to the next generation;

- 11 respondents valued the traditional criteria when choosing a name for a baby: names of saints (3), godparents' names (3), their own names or a name of their parents (2);

- 3 respondents stated that they would give their children two names: the reasons varied and also the degree to which they were specific: 1 mentioned both names as belonging to his favourite band members⁹, 1 mentioned his godparents as name sources combined with his first name and another one suggested the combination his mother's name + a name chosen by his future wife;

- 2 male respondents did not make any suggestion. They said they would choose the names together with their wives. Interestingly, one of the respondents who gave a list of names also mentioned choosing the name of his baby together with his fiancée.

Female respondents' answers led to the following conclusions:

- 4 respondents listed 3 criteria and 6 respondents 2 criteria;

- 4 female subjects mentioned the features of real referents seen as role models and whose names are adopted;

⁷ Spelling resulted from not knowing the etymology.

⁸ *Otilia* from *Enigma Otiliei*, *Sophie* – a film character, unmentioned Greek mythology characters, respectively.

⁹ *Eduard-Andrei* from *Twilight*.

- only 1 female subject would choose for her baby a name taken from mythology;
- 2 female subjects would choose saints' names for their babies and 4 other respondents would choose names which are traditional in the family (their parents') – 1 makes the option for the middle name; almost an equal number of respondents reject common names in the family;
- the pragmatic features listed by female respondents are grouped below according to their similarities, since the respondents were not very accurate in using them; many terms refer to the same feature present in various degrees; we also specified the number of people mentioning each: [+unique], [+rare], [+original] (10); [+beautiful], [+liked] (16, 7 of which referred to the way the word sounds); [+interesting], [+symbolic], [+special] (4); [+foreign] (1); [+simple], [+easy to remember] (3); [+baby's birth date], [+baby's personality] (3).

What about a name for your pet? Would you apply the same criteria?

The relevant aspects which were directly expressed or indirectly reflected in the answers discussed are systematized in the table below: the criterion considered when choosing the name and its consistency irrespective of the feature [+/-human] of the referent, which should have resulted in the number of respondents giving anthroponyms as examples of pet names; the type of pragmatic characteristics considered the most salient: the future name bearer (its physical aspect and/or personality) – this aspect being, at least to some extent, objective –, an anterior name bearer having the feature [+distinguished] in relation to the subject, or the subjective association between a name and a certain feature. This latter aspect has nothing to do with the etymology of a proper name or with the cases of internal conversion when adjectives become proper names or nouns are used metaphorically to denote a feature of the referent to bear the name.

Subject gender	Semantic criterion	Pragmatic criterion (the subject's attitude)			Identical criteria to those applied to human referents			Given name		Anthroponyms	No answer	
		Referent's feature			Word feature	Yes	No	Not stated	Yes			No
		Pet	Fictional character/real famous referent									
Male	2 ¹	11 (9+2)	4/-	1 ²	1	2	18	15	6	4	1 ³	
Female	-	8	4/2 ⁴	3	12	14	9	17	18	10	1	

¹ Abby 'happiness', Mia < It. 'mine'.

² Bruny 'an island in Tasmania'.

³ The subject said he does not like pets, therefore he did not see any point in answering a question referring to a situation he will not be faced with. The female respondent who did not give any answer was not very blunt in point of her interests: she simply referred to the objective situation of not having a pet at the moment. But both respondents were unwilling to project themselves into a state of affairs different from the real one.

⁴ The 'star names' mentioned are Nadia and Băseșcu.

Two male respondents gave strictly semantic reasons for their name choices: *Abby* and *Mia*, the latter being used not as a short form but with its lexical-grammatical function

as a possessive pronoun in Italian. No female respondent made reference to semantic arguments proper. Most respondents, both male and female, find it appropriate to base their decision on pragmatic reasons, most of them having to do with the referent's features: physical appearance, behaviour or species (the respondent who referred to that must have thought of typical names for rather common species of domesticated animals). Female respondents did not give details about the physical appearance or personality of the pet, they simply supplied a name or a series of names: many names refer to the animal's fur, directly or indirectly – *Pufu*, *Pufi* < *pufos*, *Fluffy* (mentioned two times) –, *Sticky*, *Stinky* (the same respondent gave the last three examples) –, *Picky*, *Miți* (a typical name for a cat, possibly derived from the Romanian synonym of 'cat' *mățã*); much fewer are examples of internal conversion from common nouns to proper names reflecting a certain type of personality: *Lady*, *Lupu*, *Sushi* ('the pet is in the habit of rolling'). Men respondents gave more specific details about the feature of the pet which led to the selection of a certain name: *Lord*, *Kiba* (Jap. 'fang'), *Bel*, *Storm*, *Blacky*, *Black* (color), *Honey* (fur color), *Pisi*¹⁰, *Possessed*¹¹. Only 4 respondents for either gender thought of features specific to [+animate] referents who are fictional characters, thus reflecting their level of education and areas of interest: *Toto* (Dorothy's dog)¹², *Zorra*, *Thunder* (cartoon character), *Aria* (a character in *Game of Thrones*) – listed by female respondents); *Hera* (goddess), *Zoey* (film character), *Felix* (the male protagonist in *Enigma Otiliei*) – listed by male respondents.

Word characteristics refer to subject-oriented features associated to a name without any objective reason; word meaning should be distinguished from its perception. If there is some connection to a human referent bearing that name, it was not mentioned by the respondents. Female respondents gave 3 names considering this perspective: *Bim* [+funny], *Aria* [+short], [+beautiful]¹³, *Ionicã* [+funny], [+ironical], while only 1 male respondent chose the name *Bruny* 'an island in Tasmania' (the fact that he even explained the name, which has no connection with the pet, is a proof that he simply liked the name). The features matching a pet name listed by female respondents are: [+funny] (3 respondents), [+catchy] (1), [+short] (2), [+modern] (1), [+silly/childish] (1), [+simple] (1), [+common] (1), [+good] (1).

The acceptance of the same criteria of name selection for both [+human] and [-human] referents should have been reflected in the anthroponyms offered as examples. As it can be seen from the table, the number of male respondents who gave anthroponyms as pet names are more than those who declared themselves against any discrimination (4 compared to 1). For female respondents, the situation is reversed: 10 compared to 12 in favor of the same criteria). The number of those who did not make clear their position in

¹⁰ This example was included in the current category since we thought it referred to the pet species. The respondent mentioned his father as the person who chose the name of the pet and said he is unaware of the reason.

¹¹ The respondent mentioned this name misspelled and gave a song as the source of the name, but we thought it was the meaning of the lyrics and the character referred to in them that made him give that name as an example.

¹² The explanations in this paragraph belong to the respondents.

¹³ The respondent combined the criteria, justifying her choice both in point of the name features and of the fictional character designated.

the matter (18 male respondents and 9 female respondents) might be interpreted rather as a refusal to apply the same criteria in choosing a name for both [+human] and [-human] referents. The anthroponyms listed by female respondents (*Meghi, Jimmy, Max, Lupu, Ionică, Lola, Picasso, Nadia, Băescu, Tom*) are more than twice the number of names given by male respondents (*Lucy, Lulu, Zoey, Felix*). Out of the 31 names given, 19 are English names or English variants of names, sometimes spelled phonetically, in an attempt to integrate them as loan words (*Meghi*).

Pragmatic aspects

The Romanian culture remains rather traditional in point of choosing a baby's name, the criteria having still a lot to do with the names of the ancestors or with those of the godparents. Innovation can appear in the selection of names, preferred for their 'sound' or because they are borne by famous people. In this way, both traditional culture-specific requirements and modern tendencies are satisfied.

Preference for a certain name or variant of the name (hypocoristic forms included) and also nicknames

Who chose it (your first name)? What was the reason for choosing it?

First name	Source				Reason					
					Semantic	Pragmatic			Both	Not mentioned/unknown
	1	2	3	4		The preference of the source	Referent's feature	Tradition		
Female subjects	29	10	2	1	1	12	2	15	-	1
Male subjects	17	3	1	1	2	8	3	8	-	1

The subsections of the column referring to the source:

1. the source are the parents: both (14); mother (12); father (3);
2. the source are godparents: directly – godmother (1), godfather (2); indirectly because their names were chosen: (10) (see footnote 21);
3. other sources: brother (1); family (1);
4. unknown source (1)

The first question of the questionnaire was made up of three parts, the last two approaching the matter from a pragmatic perspective. Nevertheless, 1 female respondent indicated that the reason for choosing her name, *Alina*, was that it meant 'to comfort', and her father wanted to keep her close. Firstly, we were interested in the source who decided on the name. On analyzing the answers, we divided the source types into 4 groups: parents, godparents (directly or indirectly), other sources and unknown sources. Considering female respondents, the answers referring to their first name source match our expectations: the vast majority of the names are proposed by the parents (29), 3 are

proposed by godparents¹⁴, 2 by other sources – though these sources belong to the family circle (one name is proposed by the brother and one by the family as a whole, which does not imply the non-participation of the parents, but a general agreement and the habit of consulting all the family members whose status acquired the respect of the others). One respondent said she is unaware of the source.

Secondly, we were interested in the reason behind the name choice and that is a consequence of the second question. The most relevant observation is that only 29 respondents felt it necessary to mention the reason and we organized the answers according to the following schema: the source's preferences (12), the feature of the referent whose name was adopted (2) and tradition (15). The source's preference refers to the way the name sounds, to its uniqueness (Luiza) or to the simple mention of liking the name (8 female respondents). Tradition includes the use of saints' names (1 respondent indicated this), godparents' names (10), midwife's name (1), but also names used by family members: mother's name (1), father's name (2), aunts' names (1); only 1 female respondent admitted that she is totally against the traditional criteria in name choosing, as the whole family decided on her name.

The group of male subjects generally exhibited the same tendencies as female subjects, most of them (17 out of 21) having their parents as name sources. The difference from female respondents is striking only regarding the number of cases when godparents were the source (3 compared to 10). Within the category of pragmatic reasons invoked, the preference of the source and tradition are mentioned an equal number of times. The former includes circumstances connected to the baby's birth (date, successful future mother's prayers to Virgin Mary to get pregnant) (2); famous referents' names (fictional – mythological heroes – or real – Mădălina Manole) (2); the source's child's name (1); mother's attachment to her son (1); the source's attachment to the name (1). Tradition includes the use of saints' names (1), frequent names in the family (2), godparents' names (6). The only element to be considered as more relevant in this context is the role of godparents' names seen as a bond between them and the baby and a symbol of good luck in life.

Do you have a nickname? How did it appear?

Nickname	Yes	No	Reason	
			Referent feature	Short form of the name
Male respondents	8	13	6	2
Female respondents	21	14	5	13

The question was meant: to measure the extent to which the respondents overlap the concepts 'nickname' and 'hypocoristic form'; to see how many respondents have nicknames and acknowledge that; to establish the most relevant criteria when giving a nickname.

¹⁴ Godparents are to be considered as having a direct influence on the name choice since they are the decision-makers, but they also have an indirect influence if their name is chosen as a baby's name: 7 female respondents mentioned that they bear their godmothers' names, 1 the name of the godmother's baby, 1 the name of the godfather and 1 the name borne both by her mother and by her godmother.

With male respondents the results were as follows: about one third of them stated that they have a nickname, whereas three times as many female respondents acknowledged that. The number of respondents not having a nickname is almost equal between the two gender groups (13 and 14, respectively). As far as the reason is concerned, 6 male respondents listed nicknames designating a feature of the referent, mostly by means of metaphors¹⁵ (5 out of 6 examples), whereas only 2 examples represent the short form of the name. In the case of female respondents, 5 examples represent referent features¹⁶ and 13 short forms of the name¹⁷ or associations, the last being accounted for by the subjective preferences of the respondents for some fictional characters¹⁸. Clearly, female respondents are more easily associated with short forms of the name and they have no problems accepting that.

Our interest in the Englishness of the names proved irrelevant, since only 1 male and 5 female respondents gave examples of English words as nicknames: *Nigger*; *Baby*, *Ally*, *Grinch*, *Tweety*, *Opossum*.

Do you prefer to be called by using a hypocoristic form? Do others prefer to call you that?

Hypocoristic form	Subject's attitude			User's attitude		Mentioned hypocoristic		No answer
	Favourable	Negative	Neutral	Favorable	Negative	Yes	No	
Male respondents	-	20	-	4	16	1	-	-
Female respondents	15	16	3	18	4	13	21	1

Our intention was to point out to what extent hypocoristic forms tend to replace the use of proper names, some of them reaching the status of proper names, in which case their affective connotation is at least diminished, if not cancelled. This is reflected by the answer given by a male subject, the only one who mentioned his first name written in his ID, which was actually a short form of his first name. Expressing his attitude or that of the others who use it seemed superfluous to him.

The two parts of the question are meant to show if the attitude of the subject corresponds to that of the others in his/her circle, or they antagonize. In the case of male respondents, there was an almost complete overlapping between the subjects' attitude towards the matter and that of their friends and family: 20 of them expressed their rejection of being called by using such forms¹⁹, and 16 of them acknowledged that the others do not

¹⁵ *Bobo* [+addicted to candies], *Leul* [+long, blond hair], *Nigger* [+dark], *Ciușcă* [+big nose], *Ciupi* [+poking people on Facebook] vs *Șeful*, which is used with its literal meaning.

¹⁶ *Creatza* [+curly hair], *Bebe*, *Baby* [+young], *Opossum* [+similarity with the animal's face], *Cartof* [+big nose].

¹⁷ *Lulu*, *Dănuș*, *Vili*, *Bby*, *Gab*, *Sori/Sorinka*, *Ela*, *Ancuța/Anka*, *Iri*, *Biji*, *Yra*, *Onu mic* < *Oana mică*, *Iona* < *Ionela*.

¹⁸ *Ally* (preference for the TV series *Ally McBeal*), *Opossum* (preference for the film *Ice Age*), *Grinch* (preference for the film character), *Tweety* (preference for the cartoon character), *Banana* (rhymes with *Roxana*, the referent's name), *Mishka* (acknowledged as the typical name for a bear in Russian).

¹⁹ It shows that male respondents might identify the acceptance of such forms with the

use such forms, not to act against their will; only 4 respondents admitted that people close to them cannot help using such forms even if they dislike it.

One observation worth mentioning is that the two parts of the question were given separate answers only by 1 respondent, which means that only he reflected on the equal importance of the two perspectives.

In the case of female respondents, the answers were more difficult to interpret, since the subjects' attitude does not go clearly in one direction or another; almost half of them (15) are in favor of such forms, 16 are against and 3 are neutral. The number of users having a favorable attitude towards such forms and, consequently, using them (18) matches the subjects sharing that attitude (15). Only 4 respondents stated that their close ones disregard such forms, whereas the female subjects are more easily associated to a type of behaviour implying affection, which can be instantiated in the form of hypocoristics. Out of 35 female respondents, only 1 did not answer the question at all, 13 mentioned the hypocoristic forms, all derived from their names: diminutives formed by derivation (*Ancuța/Ancuțica, Dadaia, Dianochka, Alinuța, Mihăița*²⁰/*Liuți, Loricica < Lorena*), short forms (*Dani, Ramo/Mona, Sori, Aura < Aurora, Flori, Ali < Alina, Lavi/Lav, Lo/Lolo < Lorena*), or forms which undergo both processes (*Găbițu/Găbița*).

The association of two or more given names

Do you have a middle name? Why was it chosen? Which name do you prefer and why?

Middle name	Yes	No	Reason			Preference	
			Pragmatic		Semantic	1st name	2nd name
			Referent's features	Tradition			
Male respondents	12	9	1	10	-	9	2
Female respondents	28	7	1	15	1	5	6

With male respondents there is a minor difference between those who have and those who do not have a middle name (12 compared to 9), but there is a visible difference between the number of those who prefer their first name (9), and those who prefer their middle name (2). The reasons for choosing the name rank as follows: saints' name (2), tradition (8)²¹, referent's characteristics (1). Their preference is directly or indirectly explained by the following factors: frequency and sound (3), meaning (1), easy pronunciation (1), shortness (1), rareness (1).

With female respondents the ratio corresponding to those who have a middle name and those who do not is 4:1. Unlike the situation with male respondents, there is an almost equal number of respondents who liked their first name and their middle name, respectively

diminishing of their prestige as men.

²⁰ Usually, the short form is used for male referents, the extension of the referential domain implying the connotative feature [+jocular].

²¹ It refers to the choice of godparents' names or of names borne by predecessors.

(5 vs 6). The reasons for choosing a middle name rank as follows: saints' name (6), tradition (9), meaning (1), referent's characteristic (1). It is obvious that the importance assigned to the various criteria is not gender-dependent. In point of preference, the reasons for liking a certain name are: frequency of use (8)²², simply stating the preference (4), shortness (1), distinct character (2), rareness (4), foreign name (1)²³; 3 respondents gave no reason for their preference, as the preference was implicit. Similarly to the reasons for choosing a middle name, preference reasons are not gender-dependent either. Four female respondents listed other favourite names than their own: *Maria*, *Claire* [+nice], *Veronica* [+connected to the bearer's qualities], *Antonio* [+beautiful], this being an indirect sign that they are not satisfied with their names. No such cases occurred with male respondents.

What are the first (and middle) names of your parents? Do you like those names? Why?

Parents' names	Liked	Reason		Disliked	Reason		Neutral attitude	Not known
		Referent's feature	Name feature		Referent's feature	Name feature		
Male subjects	14	3	11	6	-	6	-	1
Female subjects	17	4	13	4	-	4	3	-

Most male respondents (14 out of 20) liked their parents' names because they associate them with a certain feature; only 3 extend their affection for their parents on the names, automatically associated with the parental image. The features appreciated by the subjects, though subjective, can give information on the subjects' preferences: etymology (2 respondents), [+special] *Diana*, *Mareş*, [+refinement] *Camelia*, *Darius*, [+not frequently heard] *Ştefan*, *Claudia*, [+not common] *Marin*, *Eliza*, [+phonetic form] *Eric*, *Adelina*, [+Romanian], [+beautiful], [+religious significance] *Gabriela*, *Ştefan*, [+important anterior name bearers] *Virgil*, *Constanţa*. We enumerated them to see that most of them are modern names and none is of English origin. The fact that they are appreciated by the respondents proves that continuity in the domain of anthroponyms is not rejected by the young generation. The disliked names are perceived as either too [+sensational] *Hermes*, *Viorica*, or [+old-fashioned] *Ion*, *Aurica*, *Celia*, *Cristi*, *Constanţa*, *Elvira*, *Anton*, *Minodora*, *Constantin*. A pertinent observation is that, maybe because parents are regarded as a unit, their names, even if they differ in point of modernity, sound, frequency, are regarded and interpreted as a pair, undifferentiatedly. As a result, the general unfavourable or favourable opinion of the subjects is applied to a very heterogeneous list of proper names. For male subjects, there are not many cases reflecting their subjectivity in point of the various and opposed features associated to the same name; we noticed just the case of the name *Constantin* and of its feminine counterpart *Constanţa* characterised by the semes [+important anterior name bearers] and [+old-fashioned].

²² The first stage in the process of growing to like the name is to get used to hearing it in association with yourself and accepting it.

²³ The foreign name is French: *Luiza*.

Like male subjects, most female respondents expressed their attitude (there was one exception, 1 respondent who simply mentioned the names, which might indirectly mean his disliking them): 17 respondents had a favorable reaction, 4 a negative one and 3 manifested a neutral attitude (denoted by the syntagm ‘they are OK’ or by simply mentioning the name etymology).

In most cases (13), the argument given by the respondents showing an attitude of approval is name-dependent, though the feature associated to the name is almost always a seme only from the perspective of the subject’s meaning. Only 4 female subjects liked their parents’ names simply because of the family relationship. Overtly expressed or not, this argument implies a special bond between parents and children.

The conclusions above are valid for all the respondents, irrespective of their gender. However, it is gender-specific aspects that are to be pointed out:

- female subjects have a distinctive attitude towards each parent’s name (12): 7 of them implicitly convey this idea, and female respondents seem more concerned with their mothers’ names and express no attitude regarding their fathers’ names (5), whereas the opposite situation appears just in 2 cases (in one of them the respondent bears her father’s name, therefore she is clearly biased);

- they give it to be understood that one’s name is who that person is, one is defined by his/her name, therefore an old-fashioned name can associate a person to old age. Not accepting old-fashioned names for their parents is a proof of fondness;

- a proof of love for one’s parents is also the positive attitude regarding the use of some proper names perceived as more modern and which acquire the role of short forms (4) – *Margareta* > *Margo*; *Maria* > *Monica*; *Victor* > *Vili*; *Domnica* > *Dana* – and also the use of nicknames (*Pepi*, replacing the name of the respondent’s father).

Our attempt to see the extent to which the respondents share a certain type of attitude in relation to their parents’ proper names, in order to make a categorization depending on the feature attached to them, proved difficult since the results were contradictory. We tried to systematize the results and we included the data in a table: we listed the features attached to a favourable attitude and to a negative one, respectively, grouping them into antonymic pairs, whenever that was possible.

Feature Names	Names causing a negative reaction	Names causing a positive reaction
[+old-fashioned], [+ancient] ≠ [+modern]	<i>Domnica, Ion¹, Venera Vasilica, Sorin Gheorghe, Constanța, Margareta, Rodica, Constantin, Aurica, Celia, Cristi, Elvira, Anton, Minodora</i>	<i>Paul, Zoe, Mariana</i>
[+foreign]		<i>Aida</i>
[+amusing]	<i>Urania</i>	
[+meaningless] ≠ [+special meaning]	<i>Dumitru, Aurelia</i>	<i>Minodora, Carmen, Victor, Angela</i> (< Eng. ‘angel’) ² <i>Diana, Mareș</i>
[+strange]	<i>Pompiliu</i>	
[+sensational]	<i>Hermes, Viorica</i>	

[+common], [+unrefined] ≠ [+original] [+rare] [+refined]	<i>Dumitru, Floarea</i> (2 occurrences), Margareta Mariana, Ionel	Constantin, Mariana, Marcica, Marin, Eliza, Camelia, Darius, Ștefan, Claudia
[+ugly], [+embarrassing] ≠ [+beautiful], [+liked]	Ion, Iulica, Nicolae, Pompiliu	Gheorghe, George, Cristian, Daniel, Alexandru, Mihaela Carmen, Olimpia, Aurelia, Maria, Cristina, (2 occurrences) <i>Gabriela, Ștefan, Eric, Adelina</i>
[+traditional]		Daniel³, Ilie, Ștefania⁴, Gabriela, Ștefan
[+simple]		Daniel
[+suitable to the referent]		Ion, Marcela

¹ One respondent translated the name into English: *John*.

² The etymology given by the respondent.

³ Having a Biblical signification (by signification we mean 'referential meaning').

⁴ Saints' names.

Analysing the answers of both male and female respondents, the 'champion' names in point of the number of features associated to them (contradictory as they may be) are:

– *Ion* [+old-fashioned], [+common], [+ugly], [+embarrassing], [+suitable to the referent]

– *Daniel* [+beautiful], [+liked], [+traditional], [+simple], [+Biblical]

– *Aurelia/Aurica* [+meaningless] [+beautiful] [+liked]

– *Mariana* [+modern] [+original] [+common]

– *Constantin/Constanța* [+old-fashioned] [+original] [+important fore-bearers of the name]

– *Gheorghe* [+old-fashioned] [+beautiful]

– *Ștefan/Ștefania* [+unfrequent] [+religious significance] [+beautiful] [+Romanian = traditional]

– *Minodora* [+old-fashioned] [+special meaning]

– *Cristi, Cristian/Cristina* [+old-fashioned]²⁴ [+beautiful] [+liked]

Final comments

• The semantic motivation in choosing a certain name remains a valid criterion. The meaning of proper names is still relevant for the users, irrespective of their gender and professional domain, since names can influence the identity of the referent. They include the religious significance of the name into the concept of meaning. Name etymology seems less relevant to male subjects.

• The semantic dimension [+/- human] of the referent for whom a name is chosen is essential in the process of name selection. In choosing the name of a [+human] referent

²⁴ The short form *Cristi*.

pragmatic reasons prevail, while only male subjects (1/3) referred to the semantic criterion: male respondents valued tradition highly, a level almost reached by the criterion role models (real or fictional – about 1/3 of the subjects), the tendency being to make the most characteristic feature of a previous name-bearer part of the name meaning); female respondents valued name features (attached subjectively to word form or meaning) the most, the first ranked being the semes [+beautiful], [+liked], followed by [+rareness] and [+originality]. Male respondents were prone to give examples of names, while female respondents kept their answers at a more abstract level. For [-human] referents the semantic criterion has no importance whatsoever, their features being the most relevant in choosing their names, almost equalled by the feature subjectively associated to some real or fictional referent favoured by the source. The results are gender-specific. Most male respondents did not clearly state if the feature [+human] is relevant in point of name selection but an indirect answer was the number of anthroponyms enumerated by 2/3 of them (about 30% of the total number of examples). More than 2/3 of the female respondents gave their opinion on the matter and the number of respondents for whom the feature [+human] is irrelevant matches the number of those who gave examples of anthroponyms for pets.

- The reasons and sources behind the association of two given names for [+human] referents are basically the same. For first names, the two primary sources are parents, the prevailing role in this matter being that of the mother and godparents, especially for female referents. The first major reason is the preference of the source, and the second is tradition (saints' names, godparents' names, close relatives' names). As far as middle names are concerned, most female respondents and almost half of the male respondents have a middle name. Irrespective of their gender, they rank tradition as the main reason when choosing a middle name. Most male respondents prefer their first name, no reason being predominant; with female respondents, their divided preferences are mainly based on frequency of use.

- The presence or absence of nicknames and hypocoristic forms is indicative of the referent's relationships and of his/her acceptance of his/her name and also of it being accepted by the close family members and friends. Indirectly, the results show that there is a close relationship between nicknames, hypocoristic forms and proper names. More than half of the female subjects overlap nicknames and hypocoristic forms (about 1/3 mentioned short forms of their names as nicknames); 2/3 have nicknames, 1/7 having English words as nicknames. More than half of the male subjects do not have a nickname and for the majority of those who have one, it is based on referent's features (6 out of 8). From the results analysed hypocoristic forms do not tend to replace proper names. The subjects did not answer the two parts of the question on hypocoristics separately, which means they did not understand the purpose of doing that. For male subjects, the negative attitude of the subject corresponds to that of the users, for female respondents it happens the same, but regarding the favourable attitude. Most hypocoristic forms (about 1/3 of the total number) are short forms of the names.

- The selection and perception of names cannot be viewed outside the diachronic perspective and the question about the attitude of the subjects regarding their parents' names was meant to evaluate that perspective. Two thirds of the male respondents like their parents' names, the reason being a feature subjectively associated to the name, the same being true for female subjects (about a half like their parents' names, most of which for the same reason). Female subjects seem more concerned with their mothers' names, associate

old-fashioned names to old age, and, consequently, tend to address their parents by using other names or short forms perceived as more modern.

Conclusions

Following the specific objectives stated at the beginning of our study, the conclusions reached after interpreting the questionnaire results are:

1. Most users are unaware of the meaning of the proper names, but the need to assign them a new meaning is obvious; it may be a semantically 'deviated' meaning, or one pragmatically inferred, but this is a proof that semantic and pragmatic criteria coexist in name selection, perception and interpretation;

2. Users' beliefs and competences are partially reflected in proper name use; the average users' lack of competence results in the opacity of the name in point of its origin, but the interesting thing is the consequence mentioned above under 1;

3. Users' unawareness is visible in the passive acceptance of tradition as the 'molder' of our view on names and their function. Nevertheless, motivation and interest can make the average user improve his/her competence in the field and consequently increase his/her awareness;

4. There is no clash between tradition and fashion, they coexist in the form of associating two or more proper names (a first name and one or more middle names); short forms and nicknames (the answers analysed prove that they are frequently mistaken in practice) are sometimes adopted in their English variants by the young generation, since they need them to be fashionable to facilitate social acceptance and integration;

5. The conclusions under 4 cannot lead to our stating that there is a real generation gap; respondents' subjectivity in name perception and the fact that our survey did not include members of the older generations does not allow any further generalization.

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