Sound-gender associations in Urdu names

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Background and previous findings

Certain sounds sound more feminine or masculine than others, cross-linguistically (Kang 2021; Ackermann & Zimmer 2021).

Feminine	Masculine
sonorants, high vowels, longer...	obstruents, low vowels, shorter...

Mohsin & Kang (2018) found **Urdu feminine names were longer with lighter syllables**. These can be caused by Urdu feminine morphology.

Muneeb /mʊˈniːb/ مُنیب + -a /-ɑː/ ـہ ⇒ Muneeba /mʊˈniː.bɑː/ مُنیبہ

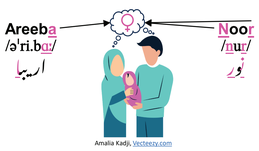
♀ Areeba /əˈriː.bɑː/ اریبہ ⇒ ♀ *Areeb */əˈriːb/ اریب *

Kang (2021) controlled for morphology by removing suffixes from names. After removing suffixes, **Urdu feminine names were shorter with lighter syllables and fewer low vowels**.

What we're studying, and the role of morphology

Popular name data is used as a **proxy for gender perception**. Parents choose names matching their child's gender (see Oelkers 2003).

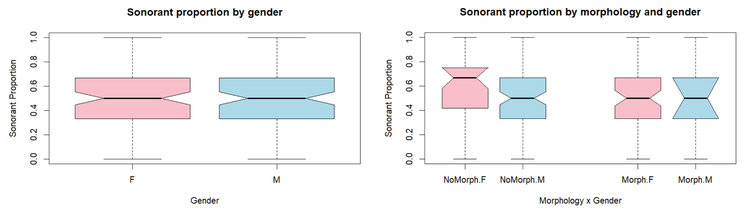
Urdu has feminine suffixes on many names, so **both phonological cues and morphological cues could achieve this**.



This means that morphology could fill the role of gendered sound symbolism, and **phonological cues could only be necessary in names without feminine suffixes**. Previous methods of controlling for morphology do not account for this possibility.

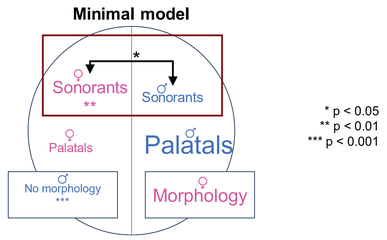
Sonorants are a feminine cue in Urdu — **but only in names without morphology.**

~100 most popular boys' names
~100 most popular girls' names
(Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education 2022)



Sonorant effects only appear **after taking morphology into account**. They interact with morphology.

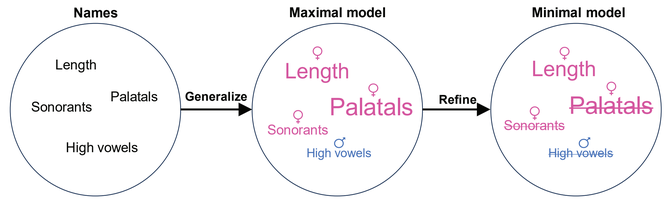
A logistic regression model and post-hoc interaction effects test confirmed the significance of these associations.



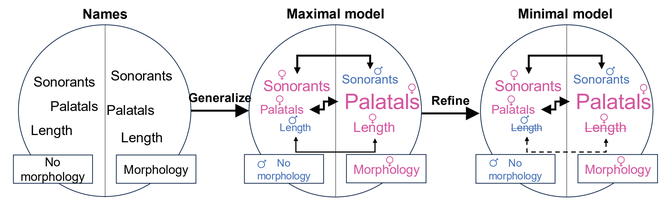
* p < 0.05
** p < 0.01
*** p < 0.001

Introducing morphology as an interaction effect

Previous research used logistic regression models, where a computer finds phonological cues for names' genders without taking morphology into account.



This only allows for each cue to behave one way across all names.



Introducing morphology as an interaction effect allows us to find different patterns in names with and without morphology.

Implications for future research

Previous attempts at controlling for morphology **did not account for this interaction**, calling their results into question. Future research must take interactions with morphology into account.

The interaction of gender morphology and gendered sound symbolism opens the possibility of **cross-linguistic patterns**. Additional corpus and experimental research is necessary to probe this.

It also speaks to a **communicative account of gendered sound symbolism**. Humans seem to readily use very subtle cues.

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