

## Testing the interaction of gendered sound symbolism and morphology in Urdu names

A recent turn in sound symbolism research suggests that names exhibit gendered sound symbolism, with certain sounds cross-linguistically associated with feminine or masculine names (Kang 2021; Ackermann & Zimmer 2021). While some argue this is evidence for universal, synesthetic sound symbolism, others maintain that these sound-meaning associations are conventionalized and language-specific (see Nübling 2009).

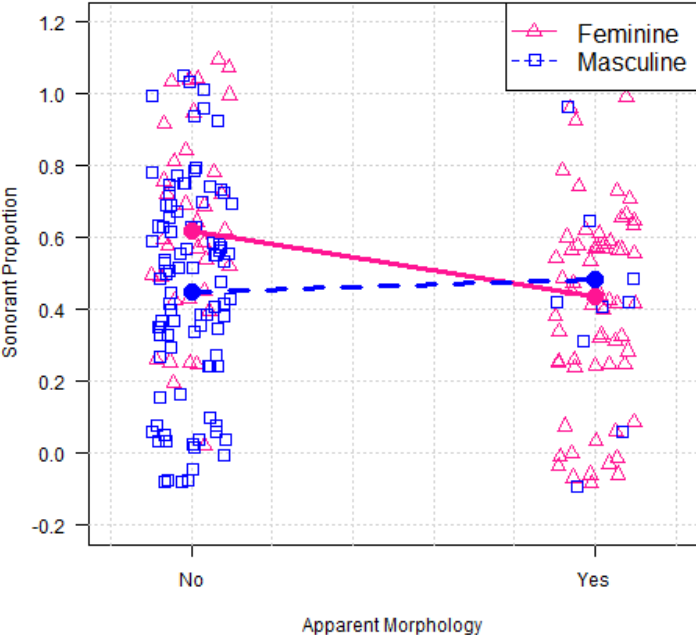
Mohsin & Kang (2018) previously found feminine names to have only marginally significantly more sonorants — a cross-linguistically robust feminine cue — than masculine names in Urdu, instead finding feminine names to have significantly more light syllables, which may be attributable to common gender suffixes in feminine names (e.g, -a).

To account for the confounding effects of gendered suffixes, previous studies removed them or treated final segments separately, relying on the assumption that sound-meaning associations should apply uniformly across names both with and without gendered morphology. If gendered sound symbolism serves a communicative function (see discussion in Oelkers 2003), however, one can hypothesize that morphology could fill this role, causing morphologically gender-marked names to pattern differently from those without gender marking.

To test this hypothesis, we analyze Urdu name data ( $n = 203$ ) and introduce gendered morphology as an interaction effect. We find that names with and without gender marking behave differently: feminine names without gender marking have significantly more sonorants than their masculine counterparts, but there is no similar effect in names with gender marking (see Figure 1).

Our corpus findings tell us future sound symbolism research needs to account for morphology and explore cross-linguistic correlations between sound symbolism and robustness of gender marking, and suggest gendered sound symbolism has an active communicative function. We outline potential experimental methods to test the synchronicity and robustness of these sound-meaning associations and their interaction with morphology.

Figure 1: Relative average sonorant proportions by presence of morphology and gender.



## References

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