Take That, *Westlife,* and the *Backstreet Boys*: A Linguistic Analysis of the Discourses Surfacing in Boyband Names

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Abstract

This study conducts a multi-level linguistic analysis of a corpus of 316 boyband names. Grammatical and semantic analyses are harnessed to shed light on the discourses surfacing across such names. The discursive patterns identified are in general related to the negotiation of masculinity as it unfolds within partly clashing norms in relation to three major aspects: the male artists' construction of masculinity, the tastes of the mainly female target audience, and the genre conventions of boyband pop music.

Keywords: boybands, anthroponymy, socio-onomastics, morphology, semantics, pop music, gender

1. Introduction

Even though personal names have received a great deal of research attention in onomastics, names that are used to refer to personal collectivities have figured much less prominently on the onomastic research agenda. This is unfortunate, as group names form an intriguing research object in their own right that grants us a more direct access to the social discourses conveyed by personal names than the names of individual people.

One type of personal group name that is the focus of this article is boyband names, i.e. the names of pop bands that consist exclusively of young male band members and typically target a teenager or young adult audience of (mainly female) fans (Harding 2020; Sherman 2020; Gregory 2019). In this context, it is interesting to determine which discourses surface in the linguistic material that such names consist of. To shed light on these discourses, names will be analyzed that consist of English language material or are associated with bands from Anglophone cultures.

2. Boyband Discourses and Band Names

Critical discourse analysis is based on the notion that the way we use language contributes to the formation of ways in which we view, construct, and conceptualize reality. The role that names play in such discursive formations is, to date, an under-researched topic. Still, it is evident that many name types, such as personal names, carry socially relevant meanings (Hayn 2016; Brendler & Brendler 2007; Joubert 1996), or are used to convey certain messages, as in product and brand names (Cui 2019; Ackerman 2011; Yorkston & de Mello 2005). These mechanisms can also be assumed to be relevant to boyband names. Such names straddle personal and product names, as they are used to refer to a group of people on the one hand, and to evoke images that foster commercial success on the other hand. An analysis of boyband names can, therefore, tell us something about discourses connected to boyband music as a pop genre. More specifically, it may help to shed light on the discursive construction of young pop masculinities and other discourses that are perceived as appealing to the central target group of boybands, namely young, by default female, fans. In other words, even though boyband names are used to refer to male groups of artists, the messages they convey are not restricted to the discursive construction of male artists or certain types of masculinities. Boyband names may also indicate which discourses are deemed desirable by the envisaged target group of a band. Through the analysis of boyband names, one may therefore expect to retrieve messages associated with "gendered discourses" (Sunderland 2004): idealized masculinities, popular displays of sexuality, and practices that possess a normative status, in the sense that they sketch out certain enactments of gender and desire as trendy, preferable, or normal.

There is a shortage of research on band names in general. However, the few studies that have explored this topic demonstrate that band names are particularly rich in terms of the discourses they draw on and the socially relevant information they convey. At the grammatical level, Berezowski (2012) studied the use of the definite article with band names listed in the UK charts since 1952 and found a development from definite article use by default towards a strong tendency to drop the article after the 1960s. This change further co-occurred with a switch from plural names (*The Platters*) as the predominant pattern, which conceptualizes bands as a group of individuals, to a preference for singular names (*Queen*), which suggests a collective conceptualization. At the phonological level, Smith (2017) demonstrated how sound symbolism is systematically employed in the band names of a certain rock music genre to imitate genre-typical modes of music making. Lee (2009) showed how the names of US rock'n'roll bands upcoming in the 1950s and 1960s were shaped by commercial interests. The negative attitude of the wider public towards this newly evolving

musical genre was meant to be countered through names that suggested conformity and normalcy and were thus in stark contrast to the innovative character of the music played by these bands. Rayzhekova (2015) studied the development of Bulgarian band names and noted a marked switch from Bulgarian to English names in the 1990s, after the Fall of Communism, and a concomitant re-orientation from Russian influence to Western capitalism in the country. Guerra and Silva (2015) analyzed a corpus of Portuguese punk band names and identified discursive patterns related to the construction of oppositional and critical stances.

3. Methodological Considerations

This study combines grammatical and semantic analyses to shed light on the discourses found in boyband names. As discursive patterns tend to surface more clearly at the semantic level, the semantic investigation of the names will be more prominent. This focus is adequate if one considers that boyband names function as mini-advertisements and that their selling points tend to be centrally conveyed by lexico-semantic material.

It is notoriously difficult to decide which musical groups count as boybands. For the purposes of this investigation, the name material analyzed here is restricted to names of all-male bands that were created in the 1980s or later, as the 1980s was the time when the first formations labelled as "boybands" (e.g., *New Edition*, *New Kids on the Block*) evolved in the American cultural realm (Gregory 2019). Besides this historical criterion, there are a number of characteristics that are typical of most boybands. It is, therefore, pertinent to adopt a prototypical conceptualization of "boyband," with individual bands exhibiting most (but not necessarily all) of the following features: they were deliberately created by music executives; they are composed of young male band members in their teens and twenties at the time of the band's creation; the band members usually sing and dance but do not play instruments; and young female fans are the main target audience. Musical genres tend to range from R'n'B over pop to (soft) rock, that is, genres that are likely to appeal to a wide audience and thus carry potential for commercial success. An initial list of names was taken from the website Boybands Wiki (https://boybands.fandom.com/wiki/List_of_boybands; accessed 1 January 2022). This website lists boybands from all over the world, but even a cursory glance reveals that most bands are based in the United States and in the United Kingdom, followed by other European countries, Australia, Canada, and Asia. South American bands are underrepresented, and African bands do not occur in the list at all. The material therefore documents an Anglophone bias, which is due to the historical evolvement of the boyband music genre in English-speaking cultures and the fact that, even in countries where English plays no official role, band names in pop music show a tendency to be English or contain English-language components. It should be noted that the names on the list are not necessarily connected to wider commercial success or international popularity, as it contains both well-known and relatively unknown bands.

The list retrieved from the Boybands Wiki was manually inspected by the author to remove names of bands that do not correspond with the working definition of "boyband" adopted in this study and further expanded with international boyband names uncovered through Internet searches. To make the database internally more homogeneous, the decision was made to include only names that are carried by boybands from (mainly) Anglophone countries or are made of English-language material. This means that non-English names of boybands from non-Anglophone cultures (e.g., Romanian *Akcent*, German *Band ohne Namen*) were excluded, even though these bands may sing in English. Although the source cultures exhibit a high degree of sociolinguistic diversity in their use of English, this was deemed negligible for a study like this, as the main analytical focus is the discourses surfacing in the material, rather than a variationist discussion of linguistic features. The final dataset used in the analysis contains 316 boyband names (see Table 1).

All names on the list were analyzed at three levels. As part of the syntactic analysis, the names were classified in terms of word class, phrase, or clause status of the forms that have been turned into boyband names. The morphological analysis covered the internal structure of the names and the word-formation processes exhibited by them. Finally, the semantic analysis identified meaning components recurring across boyband names. While the syntactic classification resulted in the allocation of one descriptive term to each name (e.g., adverb, noun phrase, clause), it was possible for several morphological or semantic aspects to be identified in the same name. The semantic classification allowed the analyst to identify which semantic domains are particularly common among boyband names. The most common semantic domains were additionally subjected to a qualitative analysis of how the various semantic aspects surface in the material.

Table 1: Boyband names used as data for the present study

112	Bros	JTR	Perfect Gentlemen	Tony! Toni! Toné!
2 be 3	Brother Beyond	Justice Crew	Phixx	Touché
2gether	Champs	King Calaway	PJ & Duncan	Trademark
2PM	CN Blue	Kingsland Road	Playa	Triple 8
2wo Third3	CNCO	Kulcha	Plus One	Troop
3a	Code Red	L8r	Point Break	True Vibe
3 Piece Suite	Collabro	Let Loose	Portrait	U.N.V.
3deep	Color Me Badd	Lexington Bridge	PrettyMuch	Ultimate Kaos
3rd Edge	Construction	LFO	Prime Minister	Ultra
3rd Wish	D-Side	Lighthouse X	Push Baby	Union J
3SL	Da-Ice	Linear	Rak-Su	Universal
3T	D'Nash	Linkup	React	Unknown To No One
4 AM	D'ZRT	LMNT	Rebound!	Upper Street
4 Fun	Damage	Londonbeat	ReConnected	Upside Down
4Mandu	Day26	Loveable Rogues	Reel	US5
4 P.M.	DeBarge	M.A.D	Reel Tight	V
5 After Midnight	Dream Street	Mainstreet	Restart	V Factory
5 Seconds of Summer	Dru Hill	Marcus & Martinus	Riff	V.I.P.
911	East 17	Marshall Dyllon	Right Said Fred	Voices in Public
98 Degrees	Eden	McFly	Rixton	Voices of Theory
a1	Emblem3	Mercury4	Rizzle Kicks	VoXXclub
A24	E.M.D.	Mero	Robson & Jerome	Wanna One
After Romeo	Exo	Merrymouth	Rough Copy	Westlife
AJR	E.Y.C.	Mic Lowry	Seventeen	Wet Wet Wet
All-4-One	Far Young	Midnight Red	Shai	Wham!
Amber Run	Five	Milli Vanilli	Shinee	What's Up!
And Why Not?	FO&O	Mindless Behavior	Silk	Whitehead Brothers
Another Bad Creation	Forever in Your Mind	Mint Condition	Son by Four	Why Don't We
Another Level	Fource	MKTO	Son of Dork	World Class Wreckin' Cru
Anti Social Media	Freefaller	MN8	Soul for Real	Worlds Apart
ATL	Fu:el	Musical Youth	Soul Decision	Youngblood
Avenue	G4	Mytown	South 65	Young Fathers
Awesome	Gemini	N-Toon	Star Pilots	Young Men Society
Az Yet	Get Ready!	Natural	Still Pending	Youngstown
Aziatix	Go:Audio	NCT	Stray Kids	Yell!
B1A4	Got7	New Boyz	Subway	Yell 4 You
B2K	Guy	New Kids On The Block	Suns of Light	
B3	Guys Next Door	New Edition	Super Junior	
B5	H-Town	New Hope Club	Sureshot	
B.A.P	Hanson	New Monkees	Take 5	
Backstreet Boys	Heads of State	Next	Take That	
Bad Boys Inc	Heffron Drive	Next of Kin	The Boys	
Bangtan Boys	Hi-Five	NKOTBSB	The Boyz	
Barrio Boyzz	Hometown	NLT	The Carter Twins	
BBMak	Honor Society	No Authority	The Choirboys	
B-Brave	H.O.T.	No Daughter of Mine	The Click Five	
Bearforce 1	Hot Chelle Rae	No Mercy	The Collective	
Beast	Human Nature	No Name	The Deele	
Bed & Breakfast	Hyrise	North	The Escape Club	
Before Four	Ideal	North and South	The Exchange	
Before You Exit	Imajin	Northern Line	The Kane Gang	
Bell Biv DeVoe	Immature	NorthKid	The Mend	
Bel's Boys	IMx	*NSYNC	The Moffatts	
Big Bang	Indecent Obsession	Nu Flavor	The Noise Next Door	
Big Fun	Infinite	O-Town	The Osmond Boys	
Big Time Rush	In-Joy	O-Zone	The Overtones	
Billiam	In Real Life	Octappella	The Robertson Brothers	
Blackstreet	In Stereo	One Call	The Reason 4	
Blake	Jack & Jack	One Direction	The Soldiers	
Blazin' Squad	Jagged Edge	One Step Away	The Sundowners	
Blond	Jedward	One True Voice	The Tide	
Blue	Jericho Road	OTT	The United	
Blue Train	JLS	Oui 3	The Vamps	
BoybandPH	Jodeci	Overground	The Wanted	
Boys in Black	Joe and Jake	P9	Tie Break	
Boyz II Men	Joe Public	Page Four	TKA	
Boyzone	Jonas Brothers	Past to Present	Today	

4. Analysis

4.1 Grammatical Analysis

At the syntactic level, the boyband names in this investigation exhibit a high degree of variability. A classification of the structure types yielded the empirical data presented in Table 2. Note that the classification is based on entire names rather than name parts. For example, names containing numerals were only counted as numerals if the entire name constituted a numeral (number-related meanings of name components were accounted for in the semantic analysis).

Table 2: Syntactic structures of boyband names

Structure type	Abs. Freq.	%	Examples
compound noun	52	16.46	*Backstreet Boys, Boyzone*
non-compound noun	36	11.39	*Construction, Silk*
noun phrase	101	31.96	*Another Bad Creation, The Vamps*
verb	11	3.48	*Imajin, MN8*
adjective	20	6.33	*Blond, Blue*
adjective phrase	6	1.90	*Caught In The Act, Reel Tight*
adverb	3	0.95	*2gether, Today*
adverb phrase	3	0.95	*Upside Down, Worlds Apart*
prepositional phrase	10	3.16	*Before Four, In Real Life*
clause	19	6.01	*Take That, 2 be 3*
numeral	5	1.58	*112, Five*
other / unclear	50	15.82	*Exo, TKA*

As band names are proper nouns, one would expect to find the majority of names to relate back to nominal structures. This is indeed the case, with noun phrases (e.g., *Another Bad Creation, The Vamps*) forming the most common structure type (101 names, 31.96%) and compound nouns (e.g., *Backstreet Boys, Boyzone*) and non-compound nouns (e.g., *Construction, Silk*) accounting for 16.46% and 11.39%, respectively. However, the share of such nominal formations (59.81% in total) does not constitute the overwhelming majority. This finding is due to the remarkably high occurrence of other structure types identified. The largest groups are adjective-based (e.g., *Blond, Blue*) and clause-based band names (e.g., *Take That, 2 be 3*), amounting to 6.33% and 6.01%, respectively. Other structure types include verbs (e.g., *Imajin, MN8*), adjective phrases (e.g., *Caught In The Act, Reel Tight*), adverbs (e.g., *2gether, Today*), adverb phrases (e.g., *Upside Down, Worlds Apart*), numerals (e.g., *112, Five*), and prepositional phrases (e.g., *Before Four, In Real Life*).

On the morphological level, the make-up of boyband names also shows a high degree of heterogeneity. This surfaces in the popularity of less common word-formation processes (i.e., processes other than the three most common ones in English: derivation, compounding, and conversion). There is a relatively large share of abbreviations (i.e., 44 names, 13.92%) among the boyband names (e.g., *AJR, JLS, BtoB*). Other formations exploit the homophony of numbers or letters with words or word components or draw on grapheme substitutions in which the number or letter symbols replace standard spellings (e.g., *All-4-One*, "for"; *Boyz II Men*, "to"; *N-Toon*, "in tune"; 15 names, 4.75%). In some such formations, the pronunciation of the resulting name representation is not fully equivalent to the target word (e.g., *L8r*, "later", *D'ZRT*, "desert"; *2wo Third3*, "two thirds"). Numerous names in the dataset (28 names, 8.86%) use non-standard or alternative phonetic spellings of English words (e.g., *Az Yet, Blazin' Squad, Shai, The Boyz*). Such spellings are reminiscent of youth language and online communication. But non-standard language use in general also has a history of stereotypical association with working-class masculinity—a phenomenon that Trudgill (1972) has described in terms of a "covert prestige" for men as a social group. Alternative spellings can, therefore, be used in boyband names to create associations with certain types of masculinity that can be delineated as casual and non-conforming. At the same time, they can be read as indexes of "coolness", as they adapt features we know from online language use and texting.

Some names use punctuation marks as components, often in innovative ways (e.g., *Bed & Breakfast*, *Br'oZ, Fu:el, *NSYNC, What's Up!*; 12 names, 3.80%). Another common morphological pattern (44 names; 13.92%) is the inclusion of plural markers, which may have the effect of conceptualizing a band more in terms

of a group of individuals rather than as a collective formation (e.g., *Boys in Black, New Kids On The Block, Whitehead Brothers*). Among the less common morphological patterns in the data, there are blends (e.g., *Fource*, "four" + "force"; *Jedward*, "John" + "Edward") and clipped formations (e.g., *Collabro*, "collaboration brothers"; *Rak-Su*, "tracks vs. suits"). Overall, the boyband names echo a high degree of linguistic innovation at the grammatical level, which is uncommon for most name types. In this regard, the boyband names in this investigation are similar to product names (e.g., Sjöblom, Ainiala, & Hakala 2013), which may underscore their commercial nature and their need to appeal to the audience.

4.2 Semantic Analysis

The analysis of the semantic components in the boyband names was conducted in hopes of shedding a more direct light on the discourses involved. Table 3 lists the semantic components that occurred in at least six boyband names in the dataset.

Among the 32 male personal nouns used in the band names, there are two that stand out as particularly common ways of referring to boyband members. One of these is the noun *boy*, which occurs 14 times and is, in all but one case, used in the plural, spelled either as *Boys* or *Boyz*. These forms characterize boybands as connected to young masculinities. Note that the band members are called *boys* even though most of them are de facto adults. This pattern is well-documented for the noun *girl*, which has been shown to be commonly used for adult women in many contexts, while *boy* is mostly restricted to reference to under-age male people (Sigley & Holmes 2002). The use of the latter in boyband names can be read as an expression of a higher degree of male sexual objectification, with adult men being trivialized to the status of "boys" (also compare the sexually objectifying use of *boy* in the compounds *boy toy* [U.S. English] and *toy boy* [British English], rather than ?*mantoy/toyman*). Nouns denoting adult men occur in lower frequencies in boyband names (*man/men* and *guy(s)* occur three times each).

The second prominent group is formations related to the noun *brother(s),* including alternative spellings and the clipped forms *bro(s)*. These occur, in total, six times and construct the relationship between boyband members as a close, affectionate friendship that borders family ties. Such homosociality discourses have recently been described by the term *bromance*, which suggests similarities in the expression of affection between romantic relationships and men bonding as friends (see Kiesling 2013, 2005).

Apart from male nouns, boyband names also commonly contain personal names that are male or likely to be read as male (e.g., *After Romeo*, *Blake*, *Joe Public*, *Right Said Fred*). The notable rarity of female forms in boyband names contributes to the assertion of masculinity in this genre. There is one boyband name in the dataset incorporating a name that is likely to be read as female (*Hot Chelle Rae*). Two names feature a female personal noun. The name *The Vamps* may not intentionally be female-related, as the band claims their name is related to the Twilight Saga and then is more likely to be a shortened version of the noun "vampire." An explicit renouncing of femaleness is expressed in the band name *No Daughter of Mine*, which refers to a group of female-to-male trans artists.

Table 3: Semantic components occurring across boyband names (n > 5)

Semantic component	Abs Freq.	Rel. Freq.%	Examples
Number	70	22.15	*911, 2 be 3, Five*
personal nouns	62	19.62	
male	33		*Backstreet Boys, Brutha, Guy*
female nouns	2		*No Daughter of Mine, The Vamps*
gender-neutral nouns	15		*Champs, Heads of State, Playa*
collective nouns (12)	12		*Blazin' Squad, Justice Crew, The Kane Gang*
place	40	12.66	*Avenue, O-Town, Jericho Road*
personal names	26	8.23	
male names	15		*After Romeo, Blake, Right Said Fred*
female names	1		*Hot Chelle Rae*
surnames	10		*Hanson, Jonas Brothers, The Moffatts*
sound	20	6.33	*Londonbeat, Riff, Soul for Real*
imperative	17	5.38	*Get Ready!, Let Loose, Take That*
desire	15	4.75	*H.O.T., Indecent Obsession, Rizzle Kicks*
time	12	3.80	*4 AM, 5 Seconds of Summer, Today*
color	10	3.16	*Blue, Boys in Black, Midnight Red*
positive appraisal	10	3.16	*Awesome, Ideal, Perfect Gentlemen*
young	9	2.85	*Far Young, Immature, Musical Youth*
union	9	2.85	*2gether, ReConnected, The United*
force	9	2.85	*Bearforce 1, Big Bang, Damage*
non-conforming	7	2.22	*Anti Social Media, No Authority, Stray Kids*
real	6	1.90	*In Real Life, Soul for Real, True Vibe*
first person	6	1.90	*Color Me Badd, Mytown, US5*
new	6	1.90	*New Boyz, New Edition, Nu Flavor*

Many of the remaining personal nouns used in boyband names support the discourses just outlined. For example, among the lexically gender-neutral personal nouns that occur, many are stereotypically associated with male referents (e.g., *Heads of the State*, *Playa*, *Prime Minister*, *Star Pilots*) or denote underage people (e.g., *Musical Youth*, *NorthKid*). Furthermore, the semantic component "young" occur in names like *Far Young* or *Immature*.

An additional set of personal nouns that is commonly involved in the formation of the boyband names investigated in this study is nouns denoting a social collectivity. Such collective personal nouns often denote not only groups of people but also domains stereotypically connected to masculinity. Examples are listed in (1).

(1)   Collective personal nouns in boyband names:

      New Hope Club, *The Escape Club*

      The Collective

      Blazin' Squad, *Troop*

      Justice Crew, *World Class Wreckin' Cru*

      The Kane Gang

      Honor Society, *Young Men Society*

While formations with components such as *club* and *collective* are neutral with respect to gender, the nouns *squad* and *troop* draw on the military as a traditionally male domain. Similarly, the nouns *crew* and *gang* are primarily male in their connotations (with additional links to hip-hop and crime respectively), while the term *society* carries stereotypical associations with fraternities. Also note that the lexical items combined with these male-associated collective nouns are compatible with masculinities known from Western movies (*justice*, *honor*, *[Citizen] Kane*, *blazin'*, *wreckin'*).

A final sub-area of personal references besides personal nouns and personal names that is less frequently represented in boyband names is pronouns. The most common ones are first person pronouns (6 names, 1.90%; e.g., *Color Me Badd, Mytown*). First person plural pronouns tend to refer to the band as a collectivity (*Oui3,*

US5) but may also be inclusive in the sense that they can potentially refer to both band and audience together (e.g., *Why Don't We*).

The semantic feature "number" is the most frequent semantic component in the boyband name list overall, with 70 out of 316 names (22.15%) incorporating numerical values. Many of these numbers refer to a personal collectivity and give us an indication of how many members there are in a band. Consequently, the numbers 3, 4 and 5 occur most commonly, as they delimit typical boyband sizes. Examples are presented in (2).

(2)   Boyband names incorporating the numerical values 3, 4, and 5:

2 be 3, *3T*, *B3*, *3 Piece Suite*

4 Fun, *All-4-One*, *Son by Four*, *The Reason 4*

B5, *Five*, *Hi-Five*, *Take 5*

Other names contain elements that denote a union or togetherness without specifying how many people are involved (e.g., *2gether*, *CollaBro*, *ReConnected*, *The United*, *Union J*).

Two further semantic aspects that contribute to the discursive formation of bandboy identities in band names are those covered under the components "force" and "non-conforming." There is a stereotypical link between working-class masculinity and concepts related to force and destruction that is also exploited in band names like *Big Bang*, *Bearforce 1*, *Busted*, *Damage*, or *Fource*. Other band names characterize boybands as somehow non-conforming or rebellious, which also resonates with stereotypical masculinity images (e.g., *Anti Social Media*, *No Authority*, *No Name*, *Stray Kids*). Courage (*B-Brave*, *No Mercy*), crime or wrongdoing (e.g., *Caught In The Act*, *Lovable Rogues*), and danger (e.g., *911*, *Code Red*) are also stereotypically masculine domains but occur only in a few band names. Taken together, this sub-group of names constructs "bad boy" images as appealing (compare also names like *Another Bad Creation* and *Bad Boys Inc*).

Moving on to the domain of sexuality, we find several names that incorporate components that relate to the expression of desire. These range from vague references to wishes and dreams (e.g., *3rd Wish, Dream Street, Imajin*) over romantic images (e.g., *After Romeo*, *Loveable Rogues*) to fairly explicit references to sexual objectification (e.g., *H.O.T.*, *Hot Chelle Rae*), sexual desires (*Indecent Obsession*), and physical processes (*Rizzle Kicks*). These formations attest to a strong connection between the discursive construction of masculinity and male sexual agency in boyband names that is perceived to be appealing to the target audience. At the same time, these references to sexuality in boyband names appear to be fairly harmless when compared to band names in other contemporary music genres (see Salmons & Macaulay 1988), which indicates that the boybands' approach to sexuality is decidedly non-aggressive.

Besides sexuality, an obvious domain to link boyband masculinities to is the realm of music. Twenty band names (6.33%) contain lexical items that denote some kind of sound. These items may directly describe musical genres (*Octappella*, *Soul Decision*, *Soul for Real*) or other musical aspects (*Londonbeat*, *Musical Youth, N-Toon*, **NSYNC*, *Overtones*, *Riff*), but it is evident that, in many cases, semantically more negative words are used that liken music to some sort of noise (e.g., *Big Bang*, *The Noise Next Door*, *Yell!*, *Yell 4 You*). This latter phenomenon can be interpreted as a discursive strategy to make music more compatible with hegemonic masculinity discourses. Activities performed by boybands, such as singing and dancing, may be viewed as positive and desirable by the fan audiences. However, they clash with traditional notions of heterosexual masculinity, which necessitates that boybands engage in discursive negotiation processes.

The commercial nature of boyband names shines through in sematic aspects that they share with advertising language (e.g., Hermerén 1999; Goddard 1998) or, more specifically, with product and brand names (Smith 2017; Androutsopoulos 2001). Among these is the use of positive adjectives of appraisal (e.g., *a1*, *Awesome*, *Ideal*, *Mint Condition*, *Perfect Gentlemen*) as well as forms denoting "realness" and authenticity (e.g., *In Real Life*, *One True Voice*, *Soul for Real*, *True Vibe*), or novelty (e.g., *New Boyz, New Hope Club, Nu Flavor*). A central goal of advertising texts is to engage the audience. This can be achieved through direct address via 2nd person pronouns or the (pronounless) address through imperative verb forms and clauses. Second person pronouns play only a minor role in boyband names and are restricted to three formations (*Before You Exit*, *Forever in Your Mind*, *Yell 4 You*). However, 17 boyband names (5.38%) contain verb forms that can at least potentially be read as imperatives (e.g., *Get Ready!*, *Go:Audio*, *Let Loose*, *Push Baby*, *React*, *Take That*) and, therefore, have an activating character.

Some boyband names make use of color terms, as exemplified in (3):

(3)   Use of color terms in boyband names:

   Blackstreet, *Boys in Black*

   Blue, *CN Blue*, *Blue Train*

   Code Red, *Midnight Red*

   Blond

   Amber Run

It is evident that the color vocabulary used in boyband names is not particularly elaborate and mainly restricted to the three basic color terms *black, blue*, and *red*. These terms are also metaphorically connected to other meanings that may be relevant to boyband music. The term *black* indicates a connection to musical genres such as R'n'B, Soul, and Rap, in which Black artists play a dominant role. The color blue is stereotypically coded as masculine in many cultures (in contrast to pink), and the adjective *blue* can also be used to describe a state of sadness, which is a central image in love songs. Red, by contrast, is commonly associated with a symbolization of danger, which serves to construct heroic masculinities. More elaborate color terms (like *amber*) are the exception in boyband names. This corresponds to gendered speech stereotypes that attribute elaborate color vocabulary to female language use and a restriction to basic color terms to male language use (Frank 1990; Lakoff 1975).

   The remaining two semantic domains that occur in substantial frequencies are "time" (12 names) and "place" (40 names). When inspecting the names that relate to the domain of "time" (examples in (4)), one finds that most time references denote specific points in time (certain times of day: *4 AM, 4 P.M., 5 After Midnight, Before Four, Midnight Red*; specific days: *Day26, Today*) or very short time period (*5 Seconds of Summer*). Longer durations occur more rarely and in an unspecific way (*Az Yet, L8r, Past to Present*), without references to longer time units like minutes, days, weeks, months, years, decades, or centuries.

(4)   *4 AM, 4 P.M., 5 After Midnight, Before Four, Midnight Red*

   Day26, Today

   5 Seconds of Summer

   Az Yet, L8r, Past to Present

The time references in boyband names thus convey a message of "live in the here and now" that does not suggest traditional heteronormative ideals such as long-term relationships or lifelong faithfulness. This may also have to do with the envisaged target group, as it is perceived as unlikely that girls (and boys) will find lifetime partners at a young age. With the exception of *L8r*, no future references can be found in the names, which suggests that the present is the major focal point.

   The group of names that include a location is exemplified in (5):

(5)   *Hometown, London Boys, O-Town, Rixton, Youngstown*

   Heffron Drive, Jericho Road, Kingsland Road, Lexington Bridge, Lighthouse X, Upper Street

   Avenue, Backstreet Boys, Mainstreet, New Kids on the Block, Subway

   East 17, North and South, One Direction, South 65, Westlife

   Aziatix, BoybandPH

   Boyzone, Guys Next Door

As can be seen from these examples, place references in boyband names often anchor the band in an urban setting. We find references to towns and cities (*Hometown, London Boys, O-Town, Rixton, Youngstown*) as well as to particular streets and buildings (*Heffron Drive, Jericho Road, Kingsland Road, Lexington Bridge, Lighthouse X, Upper Street*). Place-denoting common nouns in boyband names also tend to point to spatial aspects connected to life in urban centers (*Avenue, Backstreet Boys, Mainstreet, New Kids on the Block, Subway*). This privileging of urban as opposed to rural areas is an outcome of cities being considered places at the vanguard of cultural production in general and of pop music more specifically. Finally, some band names contain references to cardinal directions (*East 17, North and South, One Direction, South 65, Westlife*). Only a few names refer to large regions such as continents or countries (*Aziatix, BoybandPH* [*PH* stands for Philippines]), and there is a minor pattern of declaring certain locations male spaces (*Boyzone, Guys Next Door*).

5. Summary and Conclusion

The morphological, syntactic, and semantic analysis of a database of 316 boyband names carried out here has shown that such an investigation is able to reveal central patterns contributing to the discursive construction of boybands at the linguistic level. On the grammatical plane, boyband names show a higher degree of morphological and syntactic variance than other personal name types and can thus be considered the outcome of a high degree of creativity and commercial orientation. At the semantic level, boyband names reflect that band members are young men whose involvement with the music business requires identity negotiation. The face threat to traditional masculinities posed by the professional activities of singing and dancing requires an affirmation of masculinity that surfaces, for example, in the use of lexically male nouns, male personal names, socially male (individual and collective) personal nouns, and references to stereotypically male domains. At the same time, the masculinities and sexualities represented in boyband names need to be constructed in ways that appeal to the target group—traditionally, young, heterosexual female fans. Other discursive patterns include a connection to urban centers, the present as the central point of temporal orientation, language use connected to commercial contexts, and stereotypes of male language use. It is evident that the gender-related discursive patterns identified in the boyband names draw on highly stereotypical and/or traditional representations of masculinity and, therefore, are far from questioning traditional gender norms.

The linguistic features uncovered in this study can be considered typical characteristics of boyband names, and many of them facilitate the attribution of an unknown name to the boyband music genre. If you encountered (fictitious) names like *WE4* or *Passion Boyzz*, you might well guess that they refer to boybands, especially if the context is associated with pop music. What is puzzling is the fact that these discursive patterns seem to be appropriated today to form names of other types of personal groups. Recently created far-right, white supremacist groups carry names like *Proud Boys* or *Oath Keepers*, which are reminiscent of boyband names (Assunção 2021). The use of such naming patterns can be read as a strategic move to trivialize political groups that are widely perceived as unacceptable or socially harmful, with the goal of facilitating higher support and acceptance in society for these groups. Such "boyband washing" processes merit greater research attention in the future.

Furthermore, there are adaptations of the boyband genre to politics, such as Trump's (fictitious) boyband *Boys 2 Klan* (an intertextual allusion to the Black boyband *Boyz-II-Men*; YouTube 2021), whose name suggests an association with far-right, white supremacist groups as well. One also finds pages on the Internet where humorous adaptations of existing boyband names (*Backstreet Deal Boys, AltSYNC, Old Boys Network on the Block*) are used to disparage certain boybands, supposedly because of their right-wing orientation (Spread Your Right Wings 2018). Interestingly, it is the combination of features that are not boy-band-like (i.e., the semantic domain of economy as expressed in the form *deals*; overtly political allusions to the Alternative Right in the abbreviation *alt*; references to old rather than young men in the compound *old boys network*) with otherwise boyband-like features in a name that creates a critical or distancing effect. All these aspects bear witness to boyband names being components in wider discursive structures whose relevance extends well beyond the realm of pop music.

A limitation of the present study is the fact that the dataset used here is too small to explore cross-cultural differences in boyband naming practices. Future research may also want to pay greater attention to non-English boyband names and fan-based naming practices in relation to boybands such as "shipping" (bromance-inspired name blends such as *Larry Stylinson*, derived from One Direction band members Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson (Southerton & McCann 2019).

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