Names | A Journal of Onomastics

Examining the Association Between Name Characteristics and Academic Career Success of UK Neurologists

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ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688

Abstract

This study aimed to examine whether name characteristics of UK neurologists are related to their academic career success. Biographical information and bibliometrics of all UK consultant neurologists (N=1010) were obtained from online sources. Neurologists with a shorter surname and a higher consonant:vowel ratio in their surname had more citations. The surname's complexity was negatively associated with the h-index and citations, and was lower in neurologists currently affiliated with a top university. Top university graduates for their medical degree had fewer syllables in their first and last name. Neurologists with a popular forename had higher bibliometrics, were faster in publishing their first paper, more likely to be top university graduates for their medical degree and more likely to be currently affiliated with a university. Neurologists with a popular surname were more likely to be top university graduates for their medical degree. Male neurologists with more masculine forenames were more likely to be top university graduates, were faster in publishing their first paper, and had higher bibliometrics. This study revealed that there is an association between name characteristics and career success of UK consultant neurologists.

Keywords: name complexity, name popularity, neurologists, career success, bibliometrics, forename, family name

General Introduction

Previous Research

Word characteristics have been shown to affect popularity and success in many fields. Studies have shown that the complexity (Gao et al. 2016) and processing fluency (Melvill-Smith et al. 2022) of the lyrics are related to the popularity of a song. Easily pronounced names (e.g., *Chunta* vs. *Vaiveahtoishi*) are judged more positively (Nakayama & Saito 2015) and less risky (Song & Schwarz 2009), and are found in people with higher-status law firm positions (Laham et al. 2012). Conventionally spelt names (i.e., more usual variants of a name, such as *Diane* vs. *Dyan*) receive more positive connotations than unconventionally spelt names (Mehrabian & Piercy 1993).

The perceived gender of a name has been found to be associated with career success. Females with more masculine names (e.g., *Alexis* vs. *Maria*) are more successful in legal careers (Coffey & McLaughlin 2009). The perceived gender of a name seems to influence hiring decisions (Cotton et al. 2008; Bertrand & Mullainathan 2004), the number of citations (Zhang et al. 2022), and quality ratings of the author's research (Krawczyk & Smyk 2016; Paludi & Strayer 1985). Boys with female-sounding names (e.g., *Darcy* vs. *George*) were found to misbehave more at school compared to other boys (Figlio 2007).

The perceived ethnicity of a name seems to also be associated with career success. Compared to Caucasian-sounding forenames (e.g., *Ethan*), children with African American-sounding forenames (e.g., *Xavier*) received lower achievement scores by elementary school teachers (Anderson-Clark et al. 2008). "Black"-sounding forenames are more frequent in children of less educated parents (Fryer Jr & Levitt 2004) and are associated with lower financial status (Aura & Hess 2004). Interview invitations were less frequent for job applicants whose full name sounded "non-white" (e.g., *Anthony Olukayode* vs. *Andrew Clarke*) (Wood et al. 2009) or ethnic minority (Booth et al. 2009). Candidates with British-sounding surnames have more success in elections compared to those with non-European-sounding surnames (Thrasher et al. 2017).

Rarer names (i.e., names that are not frequently used such as *Heshter* vs. *Maria*) seem to be associated with a less privileged socioeconomic status. For example, rarer forenames are rated as lower-class status (Joubert 1994) and less desirable (Mehrabian 1992); are found more often in women, the poor, Black people, and non-professionals (Willis et al. 1982), and those with fewer years of education (Aura & Hess 2004); are associated with lower employability (Pascual et al. 2015) and higher juvenile delinquency (Kalist & Lee 2009); and are given to children by less-educated parents (Aura & Hess 2004; Lieberson & Bell 1992).

Word frequency and word complexity properties have previously been found to be associated with the trustworthiness of the person bearing that word as their name (Silva et al. 2017), the ability to remember the words (Madan 2021; Tehan & Tolan 2007), or prediction of the likelihood of remembering the words (Jia et al. 2016); specifically, word length [i.e., shorter words are more likely to be remembered (Bergh et al. 1984)],

DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688 Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

number of consonants and vowels, the consonant:vowel ratio (C:V ratio), the longest number of consequent consonants, the number of consonant sequences, initial plosives, and global name frequency.

Many studies have shown that consonants have a more privileged role in word processing compared to vowels, likely because, across languages, consonants are more numerous than vowels (Maddieson 2008). Word intelligibility is negatively associated with the C:V ratio (Galbrun & Kitapci 2016). Consonants (rather than vowels) seem to be used as a reference frame when creating words from a sequence of phonemes (Cutler et al. 2000). By using a visual masked-priming lexical decision task, New and colleagues (2008) found that consonants have a more important role in word reading than vowels. For word learning and recognition, infants rely more on consonants than on vowels (Hochmann et al. 2011). Names with initial plosives are more likely to be remembered (Lowrey et al. 2003; Bergh et al. 1984).

Surname initials seem to be associated with career success. Faculty whose last name initials are closer to the start of the alphabet are more likely to receive tenure at top ten economics departments and become fellows of the Econometric Society (Einav & Yariv 2006). One possible reason is that sometimes co-authors of a research paper are listed alphabetically (Mongeon et al. 2017). Specifically, authors with surname initials that are closer to the start of the alphabet will be shown closer to the first author in the authors' list. Thus, others who do not know that alphabetical listing has occurred may regard these authors as having made larger contributions to the work, potentially leading to higher reputation and more career opportunities.

Current research

To our knowledge, no study to date has examined whether name characteristics of UK neurologists are related to their career success. We predict that among neurologists working in the UK, those with more-privileged names (e.g., have a lower Scrabble score, fewer and shorter consonant sequences, are shorter—that is fewer syllables and letters–have an initial plosive, are more popular, sound more like males and more like they originate from the UK), are more privileged as regards academic productivity and academic progression. Specifically, we predict that they have more publications (especially first author), non-self-citations, research degrees, and higher university rankings (of the university they graduated from and that with which they are currently affiliated); more of them are in a professorship position and more are affiliated with a university; and they progress quicker in the academic career ladder. Regarding citations, our prediction is that neurologists with more-privileged name characteristics are more likely to be remembered and trusted when someone is writing a manuscript and therefore are more likely to be cited than neurologists with less-privileged name characteristics. If so, this could reveal the presence of a bias within the field of research where some research papers receive less recognition for reasons other than the quality of the work itself.

Methods

Sample

The whole UK workforce of consultant neurologists, that is 1010 neurologists, was used for this study.

Demographics

The biographical details and demographics of this cohort can be found in (Kapsetaki 2024a, *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience*). A key feature of the current study was to collect data about how other people would perceive someone based on their name. Thus, we were more interested in the perceived rather than the actual demographics of a person—specifically, perceived based on their name.

Perceived gender (i.e., to what extent does the forename sound like a female or male) was determined using https://namsor.app/features/gender-name. Namsor API is a data mining tool that has 99.99% name availability and processes nine billion names (Namsor n.d.). The gender scale provided in this website ranges from -1 (masculine) to 1 (feminine). A score closer to -1 or 1 would indicate that we are more confident that the name is masculine or feminine, respectively; 0 indicates unknown (Namsor [blog] n.d.).

Perceived ethnicity of the 1,010 neurologists as a group was estimated using the CDRC (Consumer Data Research Centre) website (CDRC n.d.) on the basis of their first and last name. Perceived ethnicity of each neurologist separately was estimated using the Namsor API database on the basis of their first and last name (https://namsor.app/features/name-origin#name-diaspora-batch).

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688

Neurologists' name complexity and frequency may depend on the country they originate from (Maddieson 2008). Also, where they grow up may determine the university in which they undertake their undergraduate studies, which may subsequently affect the number and quality of papers they publish. The following three variables that were included in this study (perceived skin colour based the neurologists' photos, the name's perceived ethnicity, and the location of the neurologists' medical school based on data available on the GMC (General Medical Council) medical register (GMC, n.d.)—that is UK vs. Europe vs. the rest of the world—may somewhat reflect where the neurologists originate from, where they grew up, and whether they were legal immigrants.

Name complexity and frequency

Phonological properties and complexity of first and last names were analysed. Author name length was measured manually by the number of letters and the number of syllables. The number of syllables were measured on the basis of the original pronunciations of the name. These were determined from videos of the author introducing themselves in online media (such as YouTube, Google search) or from the website www.pronouncenames.com. In the latter case, the pronunciations were confirmed with a background search of the author to ensure their ethnicity or family history matched the name origin on the website.

The complexity (and therefore pronounceability) of neurologists' names was estimated by manually counting the number of vowels of each name, the number of consonants, the C:V ratio, the number of consonant sequences (i.e., two or more sequential consonants), the longest number of letters found in a consonant sequence, and the Scrabble score (Scrabble Score n.d.). On this website, each letter is given a specific score; more common letters in the English language receive a lower score and less common letters receive a higher score. The sum of the Scrabble scores of each letter gives the total Scrabble score of a word. The Scrabble score has been used as a measure of word complexity in previous studies (Biavaschi et al. 2017; Aura & Hess 2004).

The presence of an initial plosive was recorded. Initial plosives are certain consonants present at the beginning of a word whose sound is made by stopping air flowing out of the mouth; these are 'P', 'B', 'G', 'C', 'T', 'D', 'K', and 'Q'. Surname initials were coded as numbers from 1 to 26 ("A" to "Z" respectively) (Einav & Yariv 2006). The familiarity of the name was estimated objectively by the global frequency/incidence of the name (i.e., number of people in the world with the name), using the website forebears.io.

Citation Statistics

Scopus was used to collect bibliometrics because in contrast to Google Scholar and Web of Science, it separates profiles by middle names and complete affiliation histories, has a larger coverage than Web of Science, and includes fewer duplicates and non-academic works than Google Scholar.

Duplicate publications and manuscripts published from 2022 onwards were removed. The citation statistics were limited to show citations only up to the year 2021, and self-citations were excluded. The 2022 h-index (i.e., a measure of an author's publications and citations that indicates the highest number of publications "h" that have received "h" citations) was manually adjusted to give the 2021 h-index by rearranging the publications and ranking them by citation count. The year of earliest publication was also recorded.

Microsoft Excel was used to calculate (a) the academic age (number of years the author has been active in the field of research—that is 2022 minus the year of earliest publication), (b) the normalised h-index (i.e. h-index divided by number of publications), (c) the M-quotient (i.e., h-index divided by number of years being active in research), (d) non-self-citations per paper (total non-self-citations divided by number of publications), (e) non-self-citations per academic year, and (f) non-self-citations per first author publication (number of non-self-citations received for their first-author publications divided by the number of first-author publications).

Statistical Analyses

Statistical analyses were carried out using JASP (version 0.16.4.0). Non-parametric tests were used when the assumptions were not met. Games-Howell was used as a post hoc test. Kendall's Tau was used to examine associations between two continuous variables, because there were outliers and the relationship did not seem monotonic in the scatterplot.

DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688 Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

Results

For all readers who are interested in obtaining the detailed results of the statistical analyses, a special link has been created. This link provides all of the "Supplementary Tables" of this article.[1] Gender and skin colour differences were found in the complexity and frequency of neurologists' names.[2] The results are displayed in Tables 1a.-1d. For each of these tables, the following two symbols are used: (1) * = remained significant after controlling for that variable; and (2) ^ = did not remain significant after controlling for that variable. Gender in these tables refers to actual gender.

Table 1a: Examining the Association between (a) Length and C:V of Names and (b) Demographics of Neurologists

	Letters in First Name	Letters in Surname	Syllables in First Name	Syllables in Surname	C:V in First Name	C:V in Surname
Gender	More in Females (p=0.040) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	p=0.068	More in Females (p<0.001) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	More in Females (p=0.009) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	Higher in Males (p<0.001) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	Higher in Males (p<0.001) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School
Skin Colour	p=0.306	p=0.467	p=0.358	p<0.001. After Bonferroni Correction: Black>White (p=0.012), Brown>White (p=0.007)	p=0.584	p=0.003. After Bonferroni Correction: Black<White (p=0.001), Brown<White (p=0.001)

Table 1b: Examining the Association Between (a) The Scrabble Score, Alphabetical Order of Surname Initial and The Name's Perceived Ethnicity (UK/Irish vs. Non-UK/Irish), and (b) Demographics of Neurologists

	Scrabble Score for First Name	Scrabble Score for Surname	Total Scrabble Score	Alphabetical Order of Surname Initial	Name's Perceived Ethnicity
Gender	Higher in Males (p=0.001) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	p=0.917	Higher in Males (p=0.044) *Skin Colour ^Country of Medical School	p=0.684	More Males With UK/Irish Ethnicity (p<0.001)
Skin Colour	p=0.006. After Bonferroni Correction: Ns	p=0.258	p=0.007. After Bonferroni Correction: Ns	p=0.182	More White People with UK/Irish Ethnicity (p<0.001)

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688

Table 1c: Examining the Association Between (a) Number of Consonant Sequences and Longest Number of Consequent Consonants in the Names, and (b) Demographics of Neurologists

	Number of Consonant Sequences in First Name	Number of Consonant Sequences in Surname	Longest Number of Consequent Consonants in First Name	Longest Number of Consequent Consonants in Surname
Gender	More in Males (p=0.024) ^Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	p=0.521	p=0.092	p=0.074
Skin colour	p=0.004. After Bonferroni Correction: White>Brown (p=0.025), Brown<Black (p=0.007)	p=0.720	p=0.197	p=0.067

Table 1d: Examining the Association Between (a) Presence of Initial Plosives and Global Incidence of Names and (b) Demographics of Neurologists

	Presence of Initial Plosives in First Name	Presence of Initial Plosives in Surname	Global Incidence of First Name	Global Incidence of Surname
Gender	p=0.264	p=0.785	Higher in Males (p<0.001) *Skin Colour *Country of Medical School	p=0.217
Skin Colour	p=0.383	p=0.848	p<0.001. After Bonferroni Correction: Ns	p=0.162

As shown in the tables above, males were found to have shorter names, and their forename had more consonant sequences and was more popular (i.e., they had a higher score based on the forebear's website—e.g., John). Their forename and surname had a higher C:V ratio compared to females. The surnames of "white" neurologists had fewer syllables and a higher C:V ratio. On the basis of the Scrabble score, males had more complex forenames.

As can be seen in Supplementary Table 1,[3] our main prediction was confirmed; that is, non-self-citations both overall and only for first-author publications were related to the length and C:V of the surname, in that a shorter surname and higher C:V in the surname were related to more non-self-citations. The latter was also found among UK neurosurgeons, specifically for non-self-citations per paper (Kapsetaki 2024).). Also, the complexity of the surname, as measured by the Scrabble score, was negatively associated with the number of total non-self-citations and the h-index. These findings did not occur for first names.

Neurologists with a popular first name were found to be more "privileged" as regards their bibliometrics; an association was not found for the surname; Supplementary Table 4).[4] Specifically, those with a more popular forename had more publications (overall and first-author), more non-self-citations (overall, per publication, for their first-author publications, and per year), a higher h-index, M-quotient, and a lower normalized h-index. Neurologists with a popular forename were also faster in publishing their first paper after medical school graduation, older in academic age, more likely to have graduated from a top university for their medical degree, and more likely to be currently affiliated with a university. Neurologists with a popular surname were more likely to have the full-text of their PhD freely available to read online and more likely to have graduated from a top university for their medical degree.

Neurologists who graduated from a top university for their medical studies had a higher C:V ratio and fewer syllables in their forename and surname, and were more likely to have an initial plosive in their forename. Those who graduated from a top university for their PhD had fewer consonant sequences and fewer consequent consonants in their forename. Neurologists currently affiliated with a top university had less complex surnames

DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688 Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

(on the basis of the Scrabble score). More privileged name characteristics (e.g., shorter, less complex, more popular, more masculine, more likely to have initial plosives) were found in neurologists who had obtained their medical degree in the UK.

The number of consonant sequences, the longest number of consequent consonants, the presence of initial plosives in the forename or surname, and the alphabetical order of surname initials were not significantly associated with bibliometrics. The obtainment of a research degree was not associated with name frequency.

Using the CDRC, the perceived ethnicity of the neurologists' names in this cohort was: White British (in 24.2% of neurologists), White Irish (1.3%), White Other (8.8%), Asian Indian (4.2%), Asian Pakistani (1.9%), Asian Bangladeshi (0.04-0.49%), Asian Chinese (0.7%), any other Asian (1.7%), Black African (0.8%), Black Caribbean (0.5%), other ethnic group (3.8%), unclassified (1%). Neurologists with UK/Irish perceived ethnicity (compared to those with non-UK/Irish perceived ethnicity) had higher bibliometrics, were more likely to have graduated from a top university for their medical degree and Master's degree, were more likely to be currently affiliated with a top university (Supplementary Table 2),[5] and had more popular forenames and surnames (both $p < 0.001$).

Males with more masculine names (compared to males with less masculine names) were more likely to have graduated from a top university for their medical degree, were faster to publish their first paper after medical school, and had higher bibliometrics (Supplementary Table 5).[6] Females with more feminine names (compared to females with less feminine names) were faster in obtaining their PhD after medical school, and were more likely to be currently affiliated with a university or a top university (Supplementary Table 5) .[7]

Discussion

Supporting our hypothesis, the C:V ratio and the number of syllables in the neurologists' names (especially surnames) were associated with the number of non-self-citations overall and only for their first-author publications. Specifically, neurologists with shorter names or a higher C:V ratio received more citations. Also, the complexity of the surname, as measured by the Scrabble score, was negatively associated with the number of total non-self-citations and the h-index. A possible reason is that shorter and less complex words are more trustworthy (Silva et al. 2017) and may be more easily remembered; previous findings are contradictory regarding word length effects on memory (Madan 2021; Tehan & Tolan 2007). This conforms with the fact that researchers are more likely to find the article they want to cite if they remember the name (especially the surname) of the author of the published article.

In most cases, more privileged name characteristics were found in male and "white" neurologists, as has also been found in the American general population (Aura & Hess 2004). One possible reason is that in certain non-UK countries (e.g., Madagascar), people tend to have very long names for various reasons. Another possible reason is that in certain countries that do not use Latin characters for people's names (e.g., Russia or Greece), when the name is written in Latin characters it has extra letters. For example, in Greek, 'ps' and 'th' are just one letter (i.e. 'ψ' and 'θ', respectively). Possible reasons why male neurologists were found to have shorter names are that female names are often suffixed versions of male names and more often finish with -ee, -ey, -ie, or -eigh rather than -y.

Neurologists with a popular forename (not surname) had higher bibliometrics (as found also in UK neurosurgeons; Kapsetaki 2024b), were faster in publishing their first paper after medical school graduation, older in academic age, and more likely to be currently affiliated with a university. Neurologists with a popular surname were more likely to have graduated from a top university for their medical degree. One possible reason for these popularity privileges is that neurologists with popular names are more likely to find other colleagues with the same or similar name. This will probably lead to liking and helping each other (Gamer 2005), for example in writing publications together, citing each other's work, offering them a university position, or accepting their manuscript in a journal, especially considering that the peer review process is not usually double-blind.

There are two possible reasons why neurologists with non-UK/Irish perceived ethnicity had fewer publications and citations (the latter was also found in UK neurosurgeons; Kapsetaki 2024b). The first is that they have less popular names. The second is that English is likely their second language and therefore they may have difficulties in writing manuscripts in correct English. The finding that the alphabetical order of surname initials was not significantly associated with bibliometrics aligns with the findings of Abramo and D'Angelo (2017) and Kapsetaki (2024a).

Male neurologists with more masculine names were more privileged as regards to the ranking of the medical school from which they graduated (as also found in UK neurosurgeons; Kapsetaki 2024b), the speed with

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 72 No. 4, Winter 2024 DOI 10.5195/names.2024.2688

which they started publishing following medical school, and bibliometrics. Possible reasons are that people with more masculine names may be judged as conducting research of higher quality, as has been found in the field of economics (Krawczyk & Smyk 2016), and are more likely to get hired by universities (Steinpreis et al. 1999) and be given more career mentoring (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012).

Female neurologists with more feminine names (compared to females with less feminine names) were faster in obtaining their PhD after medical school, and were more likely to be currently affiliated with a university or a top university. This could be because females with more female-sounding names may be perceived by their peers more as teachers than medical doctors (see Wilbourn and Kee 2010) and thus are more likely to follow an academic route.

In most cases, neurologists with more privileged name characteristics graduated from higher-ranked universities for their medical or research degree. There are two possible reasons for this. First, recruitment committees of top ranked universities (i.e., those that are frequently ranked as top 20 in the world; see Kapsetaki 2024b, *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience*) may subconsciously be biased towards more privileged names when screening applicants. Second, for some reason students with more privileged names may submit better applications. For example, their biography could be better due to the more opportunities offered to them when they were younger compared to colleagues with less privileged names.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the scoring of most name characteristics (e.g., the Scrabble score, number of letters, consonants, and vowels) was based on how the name is written in English. This is because we were interested in examining how it would be shown in a biography, in the authors' list of a publication and subsequently when it is cited. However, we did not consider how each culture would perceive that name. For example, Chinese names may seem more complex to an English-speaking person compared to a Chinese-speaking person. Second, although associations were found between many name characteristics and citations, these associations were weak. The reason could be that many factors can affect whether an article is cited apart from what we examined. Examples include its social media exposure, the popularity of the field, and the impact factor of the journal. Taking into account all these factors, we believe that even the weak associations we found are important. Finally, correlations do not necessarily indicate causations. Although associations between name characteristics and citations meet the temporality causation criterion, further studies need to examine whether the other causation criteria by Bradford Hill are also met.

Conclusion

Our study was able to demonstrate that associations between name characteristics and career success of neurologists do exist. This variable confounds the association between the true credibility of their work and their career success. The scientific community needs to explore the reasons underlying our findings and accommodate for this confounding variable. For example, novel bibliometrics could be created that take into account the name characteristics of the authors. Also, names could be removed from the biographies of candidates when applying to study medicine, obtain a research degree, or work in a university, or when submitting their manuscripts to journals.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation for their support.

Notes

[1-7] The “Supplementary Tables” referenced in this article may be found via the following link: https://osf.io/2sraf/?view_only=86b2c31563ca416197c2e15255f6c49d

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