

On Japanese generic names: are they part of the language?

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In this paper, I will argue, drawing on some facts about the Japanese writing system, against Kaplan's (1990) claim that generic names are a part of the language. Kaplan's thesis consists of the following two statements: (i) natural languages have, at a given time, a fairly fixed stock in their lexicon of generic names, and (ii) when we name people, we usually draw from this relatively small, finite lexicon of generic names. Japanese generic names can be classified into three groups, depending on the answers given to the following three questions: (a) can ordinary speakers tell whether it is a name or not? (b) can ordinary speakers write it with kanji? and (c) can ordinary speakers recognise all its possible notations with kanji? The three groups, which we will call Groups A, B and C in this paper, answer the questions (a)/(b)/(c) with "yes/yes/no", "yes/no/no" and "no/no/no", respectively. Kaplan's thesis does not apply to names in Groups B-C. In contrast, it can be said to apply to Group A as far as spoken language is concerned. Yet, (i) and (ii) cannot be jointly satisfied in written language. No matter how loosely one may interpret "fairly" and "usually" in Kaplan's statements, it is not possible to define a fairly fixed stock of pronunciation-kanji pairings from which parents usually draw. The more novel, the better, when it comes to written names.

KEYWORDS: Japanese, kanji, lexicon, generic name, twinkling name

1. Introduction¹

The identity of names raises a philosophical question. Do Carl von Linné and Carl Larsson, for instance, have the same name or different names? In a sense, they seem to have one and the same name, *Carl*. However, as De Steffani (2016:55) and Nyström (2016:40) note, there is a long-standing tradition in philosophy of language of individuating names solely by the particulars they name. Thus, Russell (1918/2010:13) says that "[a] name can just name a particular, or, if it does not, it is not a name at all, it is a noise". On this view, Carl von Linné and Carl Larsson can never be considered to have the same name, since their names have distinct bearers. To settle the issue, Kaplan (1990, 2011) puts forward two conceptions of names: common currency name and generic name. Common currency

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names as defined by Kaplan are individuated by their bearers, as the philosophical tradition goes, whereas generic names are vocabulary items of the language in question, hence less narrowly individuated than common currency names:

There is the generic name “David”, and then there is my name “David”, there is David Lewis’s name “David”, and so on. These three are all distinct words. The latter two have [...] a semantic function: They name someone. The first, the generic name doesn’t name anyone [...]. Furthermore, it doesn’t pretend to name anyone (as certain empty common currency names [e.g. Santa Clause, jultomten²] do.) (Kaplan 1990: 111)

Following Kaplan’s terminology, we can say that Carl von Linné and Carl Larsson have different common currency names both pronounced [ka:l], to the extent that these names name different individuals, i.e., they “were created at different points” and “have had distinct life histories” (Kaplan 1990:112). It is nonetheless true that the two individuals have one and the same generic name *Carl*, stored in the lexicon of the language.

From Kaplan’s characterization of common currency names, it follows that they “can be created at will” (Kaplan 1990:113), which amounts to saying that we can name anything we like. This view seems to justify the idea, often defended in philosophy of language, that proper names are not part of any language, given that “the conventions paring [common currency] proper names with their bearers are not among the semantic rules constitutive of this language” (Recanati 1993:149), insofar as “(this) language” is defined as in Chomsky (1965). Even if you do not know who Carl (von Linné) is, or even if you do not know anything about the referent except that he is called *Carl (von Linné)*, you can still be counted as a competent speaker of English (Putnam 1975:166). In sharp contrast are generic names, which are considered a part of the language. In order to be competent in English, you are required to know that *Carl* is a typical male name, regardless of to whom the name is given. Kaplan (1990) thus says:

[...] so far as I know, natural languages have, at a given time, a fairly fixed stock in its lexicon of generic names. When you expect a child you

2 The examples are added by the author of the present article.

go to the bookstore and you buy a book called something like “What to Name the Baby; 3000 Generic Names of English”. [...] When we name people, we usually draw from this relatively small, finite lexicon of generic names. (Kaplan 1990: 113, see also Kaplan 2011: 521)

Likewise, Recanati (1993:152, n. 3) notes that “[t]he existence of a stock of standard [generic] proper names can also be used as evidence that they are part of the language [...]”. Recanati’s position is more clearly articulated in the following passage, where he claims that generic names as opposed to common currency names are vocabulary items:

Proper nouns [= Kaplan’s (1990, 2011) ‘generic names’] are vocabulary items. Different homonymous names (such as ‘Aristotle’, which is both the name of the Ancient philosopher and the given name of Onassis) are made up of the same proper noun. In contrast to the noun, the name is associated with a particular individual, known as its ‘bearer’. That is why there are two distinct names [= Kaplan’s ‘common currency names’] ‘Aristotle’, each associated with a distinct bearer, while there is a single noun ‘Aristotle’, which is assigned to both the philosopher and the shipping magnate. (Recanati 2016: 132)

Throughout this paper, I will assume, following Recanati (1993:149) among others, that common currency names are not part of any language. The objective of the paper is to show, as against Kaplan (1990, 2011) and Recanati (1993:152 n. 3, 2016), that Japanese generic names are not part of any language, as far as written language is concerned. Kaplan’s (1990:113) thesis that generic names are part of the language consists of the following two statements: (i) “natural languages have, at a given time, a fairly fixed stock in their lexicon of generic names”, and (ii) “[w]hen we name people, we usually draw from this relatively small, finite lexicon of generic names”. My argument consists in establishing that, no matter how loosely one may interpret “fairly” in (i) and “usually” in (ii), these two statements cannot be jointly satisfied, as far as the Japanese language is concerned.

2. Overview of the Japanese writing system

Modern Japanese adopts a writing system consisting of three different sets of characters: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. Hiragana and Katakana are both syllabaries, jointly constituting a category called “kana”. Each set of kana contains 46 basic characters representing an identical set of sounds. There is a one-to-one correspondence between hiragana and katakana characters, as can be seen in such pairs as か([ka], hiragana)-カ([ka], katakana), そ([so], hiragana)-ソ([so], katakana), and む([mu], hiragana)-ム([mu], katakana). The one-to-one correspondence is made possible by the phonological transparency of kana; さ (hiragana) and サ (katakana), for instance, are always pronounced [sa], and conversely, [sa] is always spelled with either さ (hiragana) or サ (katakana). Together with diacritics, each set of the 46 kana characters can represent all of the Japanese speech sounds. However, hiragana and katakana serve different purposes; hiragana is used primarily for native Japanese words, whereas katakana is used primarily for foreign words and loanwords. Kanji, on the other hand, is logographic, used primarily for content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and certain adverbs) as opposed to function words (particles, inflectional endings, conjunctives, most adverbs, etc.), for which hiragana is suitable. How many and which kanji characters are used for content words is fixed by the rules of the language. Thus, *book* is written with one kanji character (本 (hon)), *dictionary* with two (辞書 (jisho)), *museum* with three (博物館 (hakubutsukan)), and so on and so forth. Unlike kana, kanji is phonologically opaque, i.e., most kanji characters have multiple pronunciations, while there are numerous homophonous characters. For example, 東 (‘east’) is pronounced [higashi], [too], or [azuma], depending on the context. Conversely, the sound [too] can be represented by numerous kanji characters including, among others, 塔, 党, 棟, 当, 等, 刀, 灯, 湯, only one of which is suitable in a given context.³

The writing system just outlined requires that a Japanese phrase or sentence be written with a mixture of kanji, hiragana, and katakana. The phrase ‘bought {a dictionary / dictionaries} in Sweden’ is written as スウェーデンで辞書を買った (Suweedēn de jisho o katta), where 辞書 (jisho) ‘dictionary’ and 買 (ka) ‘buy’ are written with kanji characters, で (de) (locative particle), を (o) (accusative particle) and った (tta) (past tense marker)

3 <https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/jn/index/とう/>

are written with hiragana characters, and スウェーデン (Suweedēn) ('Sweden') is composed of six katakana characters. When you learn Japanese, you are required to learn the distinction between the three types of characters. Even though many have noticed the complexity of the Japanese writing system, its implications for linguistic theory have never been fully appreciated, presumably due to the fact that, as Hawthorne & Lepore (2011:449) put it, "[L]inguists, unlike philosophers and lexicographers, ignore orthography altogether and concentrate on sound, in particular, on sequences of phonemes". The following discussion will be an attempt to reveal the nature of the system as applied to names in writing.

When you write foreign names, you must use katakana in most cases.

- (1)
 - a. Roman script: *Carl von Linné* (intelligible)
 - b. Hiragana (syllabary 1): かーる・ふおん・りんね (uncommon)
 - c. Katakana (syllabary 2): カール・フォン・リンネ (obligatory in most cases)
 - d. Kanji (logographic): - (none)
- (2)
 - a. Roman script: *Stockholm* (intelligible)
 - b. Hiragana (syllabary 1): すとっくほるむ (uncommon)
 - c. Katakana (syllabary 2): ストックホルム (obligatory in most cases)
 - d. Kanji (logographic): - (none)

When you write Japanese names, on the other hand, you must use kanji in most cases.

- (3)
 - a. Roman script: *Haruki Murakami / Murakami Haruki*⁴ (intelligible)

4 In the Japanese writing system, the use of the "family name-given name" order is mandatory, as in (3b-d). When one writes a name in the Roman script, however, the use of the western, "given name-family name" order is equally permitted, and presumably more common. On October 25, 2019, the Japanese government decided to use the "family name-given name" order for Japanese names in official documents translated into Western languages from 2020. But the decision is not meant to force companies and the general public to use that order in every situation.
<https://apnews.com/c8cec6f9137e47158186dd509aaa72b4>
<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201910300049.html>

- b. Hiragana (syllabary 1): むらかみ はるき (intelligible)
 - c. Katakana (syllabary 2): ムラカミ ハルキ (intelligible)
 - d. Kanji (logographic): 村上春樹 (obligatory in most cases)
- (4)
- a. Roman script: *Tokyo* (intelligible)
 - b. Hiragana (syllabary 1): とうきょう (intelligible)
 - c. Katakana (syllabary 2): トウキョウ (intelligible)
 - d. Kanji (logographic): 東京 (obligatory in most cases)

The mandatory use of kanji characters in writing Japanese names raises a problem peculiar to this language. Whereas hiragana (syllabary 1) and katakana (syllabary 2) each have 46 basic characters that every native speaker of the language can read and write, no one knows exactly how many kanji characters there are, and it is practically impossible to learn them all. Although 2,136 kanji characters are taught in school, the list is far from complete; it does not include such characters as 彦, 智, 宏, 玲, 晃, despite their frequent occurrence in Japanese names. These are among the 863 characters used exclusively for names. In total, you can choose among the 2,999 kanji characters when you name a baby.⁵

It should be borne in mind that the 863 characters used exclusively for names are not taught in school; hence normal speakers cannot read or write all of them. Further complicating the matter is the fact that there is no legal limit to the length of names in Japan.⁶ Neither is there any legal limit to the ways kanji characters corresponding to names are pronounced,⁷

5 <https://kanji.jitenon.jp/cat/jimmei.html>

There are much more than 2,999 kanji characters, but it is not allowed, when naming a baby, to use characters which are not among the 2,999 (= 2,136 + 863) characters defined by the government. It should also be noted that, when you name your baby, the use of kanji is not obligatory. You can name him or her just はるき (syllabary 1) or ハルキ (syllabary 2), instead of 春樹 (kanji) (https://legalus.jp/laws/S22F00501000094/law_articles/0060000000). In such cases, the name has no kanji notation. It is even possible to use kanji only partially. You can name a girl かの里 (*Kaori*), where only the third character, 里(ri), is written with kanji, the first two being written with hiragana. What is still forbidden is to name a baby <Haruki> or <Kaori> with the Roman script. In this paper, we will set aside cases where names have no corresponding kanji notation, although such cases are not rare at all.

6 https://legalus.jp/family/family_register/ed-36

7 https://legalus.jp/family/family_register/ed-37

insofar as they can be written with hiragana.⁸ Kaplan (1990:113) is thus right when he emphasises:

The free creation of names is possible only to the degree that the linguistic community will tolerate it. And the degree of tolerance in a linguistic community for linguistic deviance in naming practice is an *empirical* question, not one to be solved by philosophical analysis. (Kaplan 1990: 113, emphasis in the original)

Japan can be viewed as constituting an extremely tolerant community in that it tolerates any name that can be written with hiragana. This high degree of tolerance brings into existence three types of generic names, as we will see in the next section.

3. Three types of names

In my view, Japanese generic names can be classified into three groups, depending on the answers given to the following three questions: (a) can ordinary speakers tell whether it is a name or not? (b) can ordinary speakers write it with kanji? and (c) can ordinary speakers recognise all its possible notations with kanji? Table 1 illustrates the answers which ordinary speakers of Japanese give to the questions (a)-(c).

TABLE 1. *Three types of Japanese generic names.*

	Can ordinary speakers tell whether it is a name or not?	Can ordinary speakers write it with kanji?	Can ordinary speakers recognise all its possible notations with kanji?
Group A	yes	yes	no
Group B	yes	no	no
Group C	no	no	no

Group C is the most remarkable of the three, characterised by the answers no/no/no. Names in this group are the new types of names sweeping Japan, and are often called twinkling names. Such names are “twinkling” sometimes because they sound funny, sometimes because, as an article in the

8 <http://kanjibunka.com/kanji-faq/new-faq/new0526/>

Nichigo Press says, they “are unintelligible to all but the child’s parents”,⁹ and sometimes because their pronunciations and/or notations evoke “associative”, “connotative” or “characterizing” meanings (Nyström 2016:43, 48–50) with which one can hardly imagine personal names to be associated, such as ‘the one and only God’, ‘Hi!’, ‘cannabis’, ‘abortion’, ‘lover’, ‘wrist-cutting’, and so on.¹⁰ What is characteristic of twinkling names is that they all sound so unusual as to trigger a debate in Japan about whether they are ethically acceptable or not. It is generally assumed that, when choosing a name, parents “want to protect their child from being teased at school and also later in life” (Nyström 2016:49). To give a child a twinkling name would in no doubt make it difficult to fulfil that purpose. This new phenomenon in Japan is to be explained in terms of the rising tendency for parents to give their children a unique name, as well as the high degree of tolerance exhibited by the Japanese legal system as seen in Section 2 above. Twinkling names serve only for what De Steffani (2016:66) calls the construction of individual identity as opposed to community identity. Using Kaplan’s (1990, 2011) terminology, a twinkling name cannot be a generic name without also being a common currency name at the same time. In general, as Kaplan (2011:522) points out, we do not use generic names, because they do not name anything. Rather we talk about them. Given the dual nature of Group C just mentioned, however, talking about a twinkling name entails using it at the same time. When you pronounce a twinkling name, you always refer to a person to whom the parents give that name. Indeed, a twinkling name *N* is typically used in such utterances as “Surprisingly, there is an *N* in my class”, where *N* is both used and talked about. *N* is used here to the extent that “an *N*” denotes a person rather than a name. *N* is talked about to the extent that the utterance expresses surprise at the fact that the string *N*, which does not sound like a name at all, is still given to a person as a name. In this respect, twinkling names constitute, one might say, an extreme case of what Hawthorne & Lepore (2011:448) call “constitutive authority of intention”. The mere fact that parents give a twinkling name *N* to their baby *B* automatically establishes both that *B*’s name is *N*, i.e., *N* is the common currency name for *B*, and that *N* is a legitimate generic name. Prior to the baptism, practically no one in the world can tell whether *N* is a name or not. If you do not know

9 <http://nichigopress.jp/learn/jpculture/71405/>

10 <https://ailovei.com/?p=29872>

B, the bearer of *N*, then you will not be able to acquire *N*,¹¹ not only as a common currency name but even as a generic name. It might be said that we have here a “monopoly of linguistic labor”, rather than a “division of linguistic labor” as defined by Putnam (1975:144). Even if you are a competent speaker of English, you may not be able to tell elm trees from beech trees. In case of doubt, you can rely on the judgment of the expert speakers. Such is the gist of what Putnam calls “division of linguistic labor”. With Japanese twinkling names, however, “the expert speakers” are necessarily coextensive with “the parents of the child”; you can find no other experts in any linguistic community. Thus, there is a sense in which twinkling names are not vocabulary items of any language, insofar as “language” is defined as in Chomsky (1965).

Unlike names in Group C (twinkling names), names in group B trigger no debate in society, and there is no distinctive category for them. Group B includes such names as *Rin-na*. Although *Rin-na* intuitively sounds like a female name, few competent speakers can come up with any kanji notation. An attested kanji notation for *Rin-na* is 凛和 (凛: rin + 和: na), but normal speakers are not expected to read 凛和 correctly. 凛 is not among the 2,136 characters taught in school. 和 is a very common character, but is normally not read as [na], but [wa].

Finally, Group A includes traditional names such as *Kaori* (female) and *Takashi* (male). Any speaker of Japanese knows that *Kaori* is a typical female name and *Takashi* is a typical male name, and can write these names with kanji. If you cannot read or write 香織 (*Kaori*) and 隆 (*Takashi*) for instance, you are not considered a competent speaker of Japanese. Unlike names in Groups B and C, names in Group A might appear to confirm Kaplan’s (1990) thesis that generic names are a part of the language. This is not the case, however, if we take into account the writing system of the language. In general, a Japanese name has more than one possible notation that make use of kanji. To *Takashi* correspond such notations as 隆, 孝, 崇, 隆司, 貴志, 貴史. Indeed, the word processor used to write this paper proposes far more than a hundred candidates for *Takashi*. The list is open, and virtually no speaker of the language can exhaust the possibilities. Most of the candidates are even unintelligible to normal speakers. A distinction must be drawn between these kanji variations and spelling var-

11 For the distinction between acquiring a word and learning the meaning of a word, see Putnam (1975: 167ff.).

iations observed in European names such as *Christina*, *Kristina*, *Krystina*, and so on. Whereas different spellings in European names have their origin in regional dialects (Bach 1987:143, Sakai 2017:245), various kanji notations in Japanese names should be attributed to decisions made by individuals. The huge variety of kanji notations might rather be reminiscent of the fact that no native speaker of English can exhaust, or even recognise, the spellings of the word *through* attested during the period of Middle English (cf. Laing 2013-, Hotta 2009, 2018). The different spellings illustrated below are due to the decisions made by scribes during that period.

doru3-, dorw, dorwe, dorwgh, dour3h, drowg3, durghe, durwe, -thogh, thorch, thorew, thorewe, thorffe, thorg, Thorgh, thorgh, -thorgh, thorgh, thorghe, thorght, thorghw, thorghwe, thorghth, thorch, thoro, thorgh, thorgh, thorgh, -thorgh, thorohe, thoro, thoro, Thorough, thorough, thorough-, thorough, thorough, Thorouh, thorou3, thorou3h, Thorow, thorow, thorow-, Thorowe, thorowe, thorowg, thorowgh, thorowghe, thorowght, thorowh, [...] (515 different spellings)¹²

There is a substantial difference, however, between spellings of common words in English and generic names in Japanese. In the case of generic names, only one of the possible kanji notations is the correct one (intended by the parents) in each case, and choosing the wrong one constitutes committing a social gaffe. Note also that it is not allowed to write someone's name with hiragana or katakana (or Latin script) in normal contexts. You have no choice but write it with the kanji characters, common or novel, intended by his/her parents. In doing so, you need to understand neither the meaning nor the origin of the characters; you only have to write them in line with the parents' intention. This is how the writing system works in the Japanese community.

One might be tempted to ask how many possible notations for *Kaori* or *Takashi* there are in Japanese. The question does not arise, however. As noted in Section 2 above, there is no legal limit to the ways kanji characters, corresponding to names, are pronounced. If you want to name your baby *Kaori* or *Takashi*, you have the right to choose any kanji characters

12 <http://user.keio.ac.jp/~rhotta/hellog/2009-06-20-1.html>

you like. If the parents decide to pronounce the character(s) as [kaori], for example, then the character(s) must be read as [kaori]. In this regard, even Group A can be said to exhibit the “constitutive authority of intention”.

Does what has just been said entail that there are an infinite number of names pronounced [kaori]? The answer to this question depends on whether you have spoken or written language in mind. In spoken language, there is only one name pronounced [kaori]. Accordingly, (5) is a perfectly acceptable utterance in Japanese.

(5) Kaori (香織) says to Kaori (佳央理): “We have the same name”.

Likewise, sentence (6) quantifies over individuals whose name is *Kaori*, regardless of its kanji notation.

(6) Girls named *Kaori* are usually kind.

The situation changes in written language. It is possible to write:

(7) My name is not 香織 but 佳央理.

(8) Girls named 佳央理 are unlike girls named 香織.

When pronounced, neither (7) nor (8) makes any sense, since both 香織 and 佳央理 are unambiguously pronounced [kaori], insofar as they are taken to fall within Group A. Nevertheless, this does not prevent (7) and (8) from expressing significant propositions in written language. This suggests that sameness relation is defined differently in spoken and written names. Japanese names are individuated not only by their phonetic forms, but also by their kanji notations. Whereas (9a)–(9d) below correspond to different modes of presentation of one and the same name, (10a)–(10d) are different names which all happen to be pronounced [kaori].

- (9)
- a. Roman script: *Kaori*
 - b. Hiragana (syllabary₁): かおり
 - c. Katakana (syllabary₂): カオリ
 - d. Kanji (logographic): 香織
- (10)
- a. Kanji (logographic): 香織
 - b. Kanji (logographic): 花織

- c. Kanji (logographic): 佳央理
 d. Kanji (logographic): 香穂利

(9a–d) are four possible notations of the name of a woman. (10a–d), on the other hand, represent four different names that a woman can never have at the same time. Any woman named *Kaori* has at most only one correct kanji notation associated with her name,¹³ which, if my argument is correct, amounts to saying that each person has exactly one name.

Sameness relations in written names can go so far as to ignore differences in pronunciation. (11) is acceptable if it is written in an e-mail message for instance.

(11) Takashi (隆司) writes to Ryuji (隆司): “We have the same name”.

One might wonder whether there is any fundamental difference between (11) and pronunciation variations seen in English names such as *Stephen*, pronounced [st'i:vən], or, alternatively, [st'ɛfən]. It must be noted here that the alternation between [st'i:vən] and [st'ɛfən] can be accounted for, if not predicted, in terms of English phonology and phonetics. The letter *e* is pronounced either [i:] (even) or [ɛ] (seven). The phoneme /f/ is often realised as [v] between voiced sounds, as seen in the alternation *leaf–leaves*. No such account can be given of the alternation between 隆司 (*Takashi*) and 隆司 (*Ryuji*) in Japanese, which can at most reveal the idiosyncrasies of 隆. Incidentally, differences in pronunciation of the same sort are observed in family names as well. Yoshiharu Habu (羽生), a shogi (Japanese chess) player, and Yuzuru Hanyu (羽生), a figure skater, are sometimes viewed as having the same surname, especially in newspapers, despite the difference in pronunciation ([habu] vs. [hanɯ]).

The necessity of different ontologies for pronounced and written names argues against Kaplan's (1990, 2011) thesis, as we will discuss in the next section.

13 As said in note 5, it can be the case that a woman is named just かおり (syllabary 1) or カオリ (syllabary 2), having no kanji notation associated with her name *Kaori*.

4. Kaplan's (1990, 2011) thesis revisited

As we have seen in Section 1, Kaplan (1990, 2011) claims that (i) natural languages have, at a given time, a fairly fixed stock in their lexicon of generic names, and that (ii) when we name people, we usually draw from this relatively small, finite lexicon of generic names. While (i) is confirmed by the Japanese generic names falling within Group A as far as spoken language is concerned, it is hardly compatible with written Japanese, where there is rather an infinite set of pronunciation-kanji pairings including *Takashi*-隆, *Takashi*-隆司, *Takashi*-貴志, and so on. This infinite set as such cannot belong to the lexicon of any language, insofar as “lexicon” and “language” are defined as in Chomsky (1965). The question now arises as to whether it is possible to extract from this infinite set “a fairly fixed stock” of generic names that do belong to the lexicon of Japanese in Chomsky's (1965) sense. As said in Section 3, this is indeed possible, since any competent speaker is expected to read or write such names as 香織 (*Kaori*, female) and 隆 (*Takashi*, male). Thus, there is a sense in which such typical pronunciation-kanji pairings do belong to the lexicon of the language.

At first sight, this might seem to validate (i). There is evidence, however, that (i) as construed in this way is inconsistent with (ii). Japanese parents do not usually draw from the “relatively small, finite” pronunciation-kanji pairings that include *Kaori*-香織 and *Takashi*-隆, as suggested by Tables 2 and 3 below.¹⁴

14 https://www.meijiyasuda.co.jp/profile/news/release/2017/pdf/20171128_01.pdf

TABLE 2. 2017 name ranking of newborn babies in Japan based on pronunciation.¹⁵

	Male		Female
1	<i>Haruto</i> (60 different kanji notations)	1	<i>Sakura</i> (26 different kanji notations)
2	<i>Souta</i> (30 different kanji notations)	2	<i>Yui</i> (34 different kanji notations)
2	<i>Yuuto</i> (55 different kanji notations)	3	<i>Akari</i> (32 different kanji notations)
4	<i>Haruki</i>	4	<i>Mei</i>
5	<i>Riku</i>	5	<i>Hana</i>
6	<i>Sousuke</i>	5	<i>Sana</i>
7	<i>Minato</i>	7	<i>Rio</i>
8	<i>Aoto</i>	8	<i>Himari</i>
9	<i>Hinata</i>	9	<i>Koharu</i>
10	<i>Kouki</i>	10	<i>Aoi</i>
10	<i>Yuusei</i>		

TABLE 3. 2017 name ranking of newborn babies in Japan based on notation.

	Male		Female
1	悠真	1	結菜
1	悠人	1	咲良
1	陽翔	3	陽葵
4	湊	4	莉子
5	蓮	5	芽依
5	蒼	6	さくら ¹⁶
7	新	6	結衣
8	陽大	6	杏
9	陽太	9	結愛
9	大和	9	凜

In Table 2, there are some traditional names such as *Haruki* (male) and *Hana* (female), but there seem to be no corresponding kanji notations in

15 There are no data available on the number of kanji notations which the names ranking on places 4–10 have.

16 This is the only hiragana notation found in the table. In Japanese, some names have no kanji notation, as the result of the parents' decision.

Table 3.¹⁷ Conversely, although we can find a few traditional notations in Table 3 such as 新(*Shin*, male) and 大和(*Yamato*, male), these do not have any counterparts in Table 2. This suggests, as against (ii), that Japanese parents do not usually draw from the “relatively small, finite” pronunciation-kanji pairings including *Kaori*–香織, *Takashi*–隆, *Hana*–華 and *Haruki*–春樹. The pronunciation and notation of names are to a large extent independent of each other.

5. Conclusion

Kaplan’s (1990) thesis that generic names are part of the language consists of the following two statements: (i) natural languages have, at a given time, a fairly fixed stock in their lexicon of generic names, (ii) when we name people, we usually draw from this relatively small, finite lexicon of generic names. The statement in (i) does not apply to Japanese names in Groups B–C. Neither in spoken nor written language are there any fixed stock of generic names belonging to these groups. In contrast, both (i) and (ii) can be taken to apply to Group A in spoken language, if one interprets “fairly” and “usually” very loosely. Japanese has a fairly fixed stock of traditional generic names including *Kaori* and *Takashi*, and parents usually draw from them. Yet, (i) and (ii) cannot be jointly satisfied in written language. No matter how loosely one may interpret “fairly” and “usually”, it is not possible to define “a fairly fixed stock of pronunciation-kanji pairings from which parents usually draw”. Parents tend rather to invent novel (and by definition “correct”) kanji notations that no one in the world can understand (but that everyone must accept).

In Japanese, written names are much more innovative than pronounced names. In Groups B–C, both pronunciations and notations are novel. In Group A, traditional pronunciations are preserved while more and more novel (hence unintelligible but “correct”) notations are being created. Parents compete for the novelty of their child’s name. The more novel, the better, when it comes to written names. In connection with the novelty of names, Bach (1987) once said:

17 Table 3 does not indicate how to pronounce the kanji characters. I suspect that they have more than one possible pronunciation, depending on the parents’ intention.

[...] strictly speaking, names do not belong to particular languages at all. [...] At the very least, we should not regard proper names as belonging to the lexicon of a language – they are not vocabulary items or dictionary entries. Besides, new ones can be freely invented. Names do not belong to a language, but are merely marked as names, that is, as belonging to a distinctive syntactic type. (Bach 1987: 143)

Bach's claim holds not only for common currency names, as has sometimes been claimed, but also for all types of Japanese generic names. This generalization can only be obtained if we take into account "namn i skrift / names in writing", a topic which has attracted little attention since the rise of structuralism in theoretical linguistics. The perspective on "names in writing" is all the more important because, as noted in Section 2, there are only two constraints on Japanese generic names: (I) if you use kanji, you must choose among the 2,999 characters defined by the government, and (II) you must choose or create names which can be written with hiragana. Japanese generic names are not licensed by the sound system, but exclusively by the writing system.

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i Göteborg den 29–30 november 2018

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ABSTRACT

Namn i skrift var temat för NORNAs 48:e symposium som hölls i Göteborg 29–30 november 2018. Skriftstudier har fått allt större betydelse inom språk- och kulturvetenskaper de senaste åren. Frågor som rör såväl grafonomi och stavningsregler som skriftens sociala dimension har väckt intresse. Inom namnforskning har skriftstudier inte i högre utsträckning uppmärksammats som ett eget fält, även om många studier behandlar namn i skrift. Inom andra språkvetenskapliga fält, såsom språkliga landskap, behandlas ofta namn ur ett sociolingvistiskt perspektiv utan att själva namnen och dess särställning inom språket beaktas. I volymen sammanförs olika discipliner som behandlar namn i skrift ur olika perspektiv. Genom de 22 bidragen i volymen belyses de sociala, kommersiella, politiska och historiska dimensioner som namn har.

Artiklarna i denna rapport är vetenskapligt granskade av utomstående experter.

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Introduction

This volume contains papers presented at the 48th NORNA symposium that took place in Gothenburg, Sweden, 29–30 November 2018. The conference was collaboratively organised by the research area “Language in Society, Writing and Society” at the Department of Languages and Literatures at the University of Gothenburg, and the Institute for Language and Folklore in Gothenburg. The symposium attracted a great deal of interest with 84 participants from the Nordic countries, other European countries and pleasantly, non-European contributors were also present. The use of the Nordic languages as well as English in this volume reflects this wide range of participants.

The idea for the topic “names in writing” arose from the research interests of the editors and conference organisers, which include onomastics, linguistics as well as sociolinguistics of writing.

To introduce the topic, we quote from the most important document for the history of writing in the Christianised world, the Bible. The passage is from the episode on the birth of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Luke:

When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives [...] were going to name him after his father Zechariah. But his mother replied, “No! He shall be called John.” They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who bears this name.” So they made signs to his father to inquire what to name the child. Zechariah asked for a tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they were all amazed.” Luke 1:57–63

Elisabeth and Zechariah broke the society’s naming tradition. To legitimise this particular name choice, Zechariah uses the medium of writing, and through the act of writing down the name – instead of just saying it, the name was publicly determined and legitimised. There was no further protest and John was called John. Thus, the materialisation of the name served as a kind of manifestation of a definite decision, the name was literally carved in stone (or wood).

Another example where the mere act of writing down a personal name serves as an important instrument in several official and unofficial social contexts is the handwritten signature. By writing your signature, you give a declaration of consent. In this context, the mere act of writing your name is

crucial whereas the legibility and the result is secondary. Playing with this common frame of handwritten signing, the German satirical journal *Der Postillon* takes the illegibility of Angela Merkel's signature as a baseline to ask amusingly if Germany actually is led by a secret ruler named Cuple Whil (see Figure 1). In English translation, the German text says: "Germany's secret ruler? All government resolutions signed by 'Cuple Whil' instead of 'Angela Merkel'."

Montag, 18. Juli 2016

**Heimlicher Herrscher Deutschlands? Sämtliche
Regierungsbeschlüsse von "Cuple Whil" statt "Angela
Merkel" unterschrieben**



FIGURE 1. Screenshot from the German satirical online newspaper *www.der-postillon.com*.

These two examples give a glimpse of the significance of names in writing from a sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective. Needless to mention that the theme is far richer than that.

Written names have been subject to onomastic and linguistic studies ever since. So far, however, we lack a collection with an analytical focus on the characteristics specific to the written form. In previous onomastic research, where written names were addressed in their own right, the focus has mostly been on the graphemics. On the other hand, fields outside onomastics have recently been emerging, such as linguistic landscape studies, dealing with written names from a sociolinguistic perspective, albeit without a specific interest in names. With a distinct focus on names in writing, this volume brings together scholarship from different fields

within both traditional name studies and other disciplines that approach the subject from different angles. It is the distinguished aim with this volume to reflect on the significance of writing in the study of names by covering a wide range of topics in the hope of stimulating further research within this field.

In the contribution that is based on the first plenary lecture of the conference, Damaris Nübling shows how the *spelling of personal names serves as an index for social information* such as gender, nationality or ethnicity, and demonstrates the relevance and significance of names in writing for current discussions within both graphemics and socio-onomastics. In the paper resulting from the second plenary lecture, Johan Järlehed discusses how nationalist trends and commercial interests are reflected and reproduced through names in different *written genres in public space*. Thus, names in writing here are addressed within the framework of linguistic landscape studies at the intersection of language, national identity, economy and power.

The relevance of *written names in a social and commercial context* is a topic dealt with in numerous other contributions in the volume: Linnea Gustafsson addresses commercial names in her contribution on make-up names as an identity-shaping text resource and shows how names are used for marketing purposes. Helle Lykke Nielsen demonstrates how Muslim identity is expressed through names and language choices on tombstones, whereas Line Sandst and Väinö Syrjälä emphasise the general importance of studying multimodal aspects of names in the linguistic landscape. Based on diary material from the end of the 19th century, Ann-Catrine Edlund, Lars-Erik Edlund and Ulf Lundström discuss how social identification and identity is created and maintained through names.

Tiina Laansalu and Peeter Päll, on the other hand, show what social consequences the *change of spelling conventions in names* can have. In their case study on Estonian place names, they show that the spelling of names is considered a part of the cultural heritage of an area and its change can lead to emotional reactions. Kaisa Rautio Helander also deals with changes in spelling conventions and their effects on names in her study on Northern Sami place names. She applies a contactonomastic perspective with a focus on the *linguistic adaptation of written names* and discusses the influence of language policies on orthographic loan names. Furthermore, Birgit Falck-Kjällquist also reasons on contactonomastic grounds and shows that twin names in medieval navigational

charts might have derived from two linguistically different user circles. Ana Maria Gînsac and Mădălina Andronic Ungureanu treat the adaptation of names across languages and writing systems in premodern Romanian names and the various factors that lead to a great form variability in the contact results. Simon Kistler's contribution is also linked to the topic of contact in names. He investigates the *spelling of names in the context of diglossia* in German speaking Switzerland where the phonology of the spoken dialects has deviated from written Standard German ever since the latter was adopted.

Olof Holm makes the comparison of *written vs. spoken names and naming customs* a subject of discussion in his study on hypochorisms in medieval official documents in relation to a possible everyday use of these names. Addressing the current naming practices in Japanese, Tomohiro Sakai on his part shows that written names have a particular status in the lexicon and differ significantly from spoken language.

In an empirical study of Viking-Age Swedish runic inscriptions, Alessandro Palumbo compares the *spelling in names vs. appellatives* and deals with the question whether personal names, that are considered to have more communicative weight, are spelled more carefully than appellatives. Christina Sanchez-Stockhammer offers a theoretical discussion of the status of composite names and their comparability to general noun compounds in order to analyse the variation in their spelling as an uninterrupted, hyphenated or spaced sequence of letters.

Magnus Källström's contribution is about *written transmission of names* in runic inscriptions and the challenges it poses for the researcher. Despite reading and interpretation difficulties, he can show that the Viking-Age personal naming custom is unique in Medelpad. Staffan Fridell on his part tracks the written transmission of place names and demonstrates how *misreadings and misspellings* by single scribes can lead to permanent changes in place names. While several contributions deal with historical names and naming customs from their respective perspectives, Alexandra Petrulevich presents a *theoretical and methodological tool for the analysis of written names in historical sources*.

The theme of the conference entails that contributions explore *names and naming customs in written genres* that have not been of much scholarly interest within traditional name research. Daniel Solling, for instance, discusses the use of family names and patronyms of Swedish noblemen as attested in *Alba Amicorum* from the 1500–1700s whereas Emma Sköld-

berg critically examines the use of names in language samples in Swedish language dictionaries and its ideological and social implications. Similar questions are dealt with by Emilia Aldrin in her study on what identities and values are reproduced through the choice of names in children's textbooks. Martin Sejer Danielsen on his part discusses legends as a neglected source in etymological analysis of names from a theoretical and source-critical perspective.

The breadth of the topics raised in this collection of articles illustrates clearly the possibilities, significance and further potential of the link between name- and writing research.

The symposium was financially supported by Ortnamnssällskapet in Uppsala, the research fund of the Department of Languages and Literatures at the University of Gothenburg, the Medeltidskommittén at the University of Gothenburg, the Institute for Language and Folklore and the Meijerberg institute. We are grateful for this support. We also thank the Meijerberg institute for publishing the volume in MASO.

Göteborg and Oslo, September 2020

Michelle Waldispühl, Maria Löfdahl and Lena Wenner