

Factors of Source-Word Ordering in English Name Blends

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Overview. This study investigates source-word ordering in English name-blends (e.g., *Brangelina* from Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, but not **Angelad*). Evidence from a novel corpus of name-blends and experimental elicitation replicates previous findings related to syllable-structure, and partially reveals a novel male-first bias in name-ordering. These findings are taken to represent the integration and weighted activation of gender in phonological processes.

Background. Word-blending is a productive phenomenon in English, coining nouns such as *cronut*, *labradoodle*, and *webinar*. Importantly, English has the capacity to blend names, such as *Bennifer* from Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner. Previous work has investigated how the order of the source-words is determined in nouns, finding that length (Gries, 2004) and syllable onset (Kelly, 1998) modulate the order of the source-words in the resultant blend. However, how these factors interact in spontaneous production, as well as the role of name-specific parameters (e.g., gender) have yet to be investigated. Name-based phonology has been well-studied and previous literature has shown distinct patterns between male and female names in English (e.g., Cutler, McQueen, & Johnson, 1990; Frederickson, 2007; Cassidy, Kelly, & Sharoni, 1999). However, previous work on binomial constructions (e.g., Sampson and Delilah) found a gender-based ordering effect even when these phonological factors were controlled (Wright, Hay, & Bent, 2005). We predict that name-blends would exhibit a similar male-first preference in their source-word ordering when factors that cue gender phonologically, such as name length and syllable structure, are equalized.

Corpus. A novel corpus of name-blends was compiled from social media (N=468). Ordinarily first source-words were annotated in terms of their length (phoneme count) and word-initial onset-complexity relative to the second source-word. Levels of relative length, onset complexity, and the gender of each name were added as factors in a backwards-selection model. All factors were independently significant, such that longer names were typically ordered second ($\beta=.10$, $p=0.034$), more complex onsets were typically ordered first ($\beta=.34$, $p<0.001$), and male-names were ordered first ($\beta=.21$, $p<0.001$) The structural findings align with the aforementioned literature, while the gender finding aligns with predictions.

Experiment. To explicitly control for phonological factors, native English speakers (n=54) participated in a novel name-blending task that applied the factors of length and onset-complexity to heterosexual name pairs (e.g., *Blake & Sandra*). 16 male and female names, controlled for frequency, were counterbalanced to produce 9 experimental conditions: relative length of the male name being either shorter than, equal to, or longer than the female name & the relative onset-complexity of the male name being either less than, equal to, or greater than the female name. See Table 1 for a list of conditions and examples. Results partially replicate the corpus findings such that onset-complexity (glmer, $p=0.011$), but not length (glmer, $p=0.19$), significantly predicts source-word ordering. When creating novel name-blends, participants are more likely to place names with a more complex word-initial onset first. However, the results of a gender analysis run counter to the findings of the corpus data. When length and onset are controlled, participants do not exhibit a male-first bias in source-word ordering (glmer, $p=0.53$). See Figure 1.

Conclusion. Taken together, results from both the corpus and experimental analysis suggest that word-initial onset complexity is most important in name-blends. Gender was found to be a significant factor in the corpus, but chiefly not the experimental results. This discordance may suggest that gender in enriched contexts (i.e., corpora) is more informative in blends than the canonical gender associations in controlled contexts (i.e., experimental work). Future work investigating how and when gender is incorporated into phonological processes is planned. Additionally, whether more psychologically salient cues to gender (e.g., faces) are better able to elicit the gender effects seen in the corpus work.

Condition		Item	
Length	Onset	Male	Female
Equal	Equal	Gavin	Nancy
	Greater	Trevor	Karen
	Lesser	Maxwell	Brandi
Greater	Equal	Maxwell	Karen
	Greater	Clinton	Nancy
	Lesser	Douglas	Grace
Lesser	Equal	Gavin	Margaret
	Greater	Blake	Candace
	Lesser	Seth	Christine

Table 1. Length and onset conditions with examples of both male and female names. Condition labels refer to the male name relative to the female name.

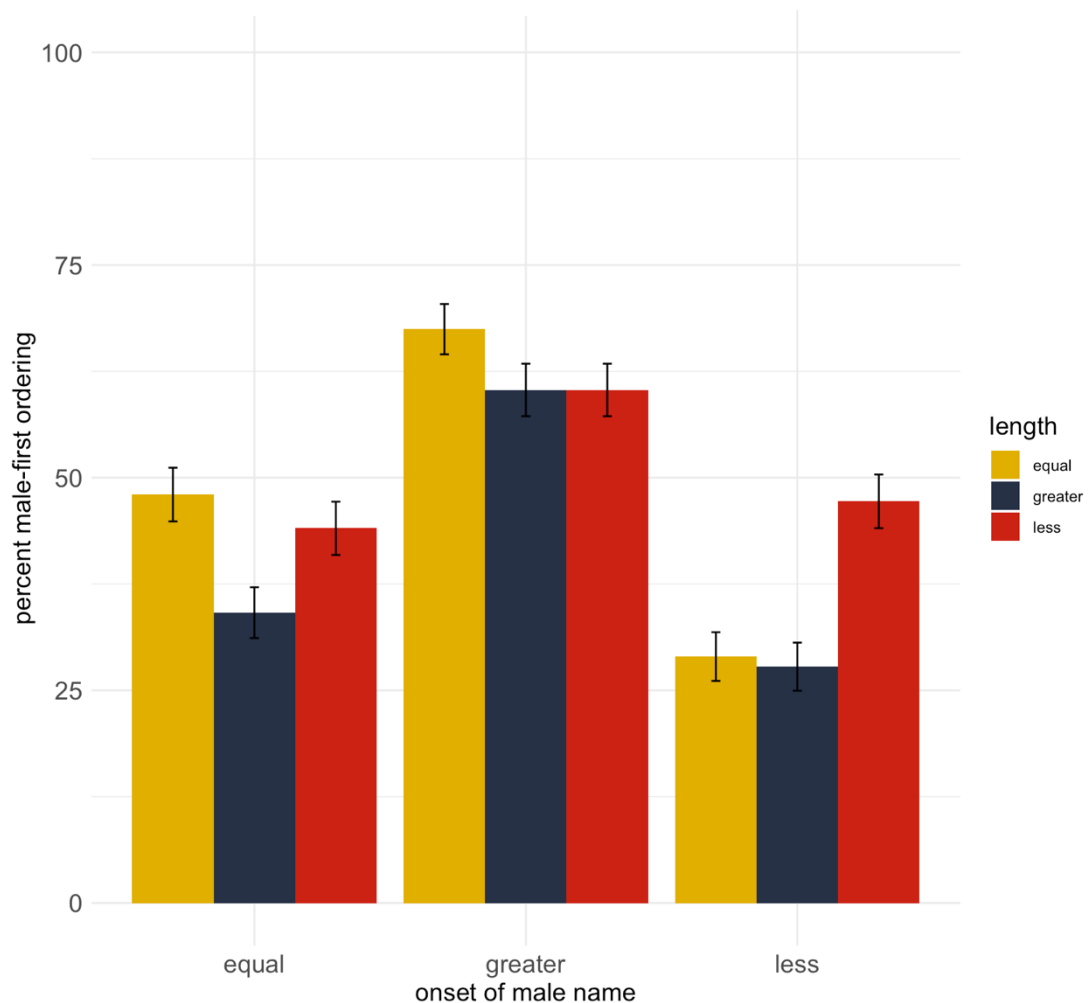


Figure 1. Proportion of male-first name ordering by condition

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