

Sample assignment 6  
Names & gender over time

### Overview

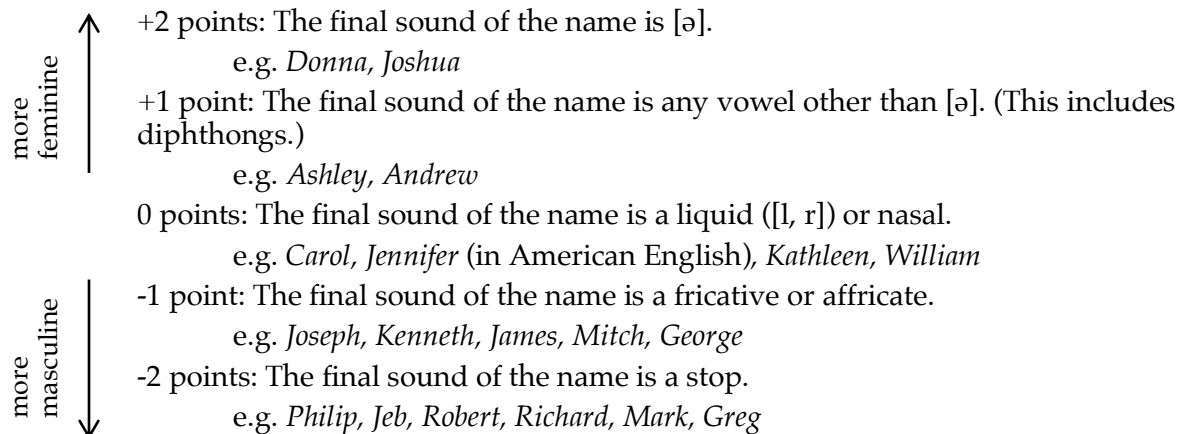
In this assignment, you'll explore whether the phonological features that indirectly index gender in naming play a more or less prominent role in naming babies of different sexes over the course of the twentieth century. The data for you to work with contains the top 10 baby names per sex for one year from each decade between 1904 and 2004 for the U.K., and 1890 and 2010 for the U.S.

Your task is to examine whether names have changed their "genderedness" over time. As there are a number of phonological correlates of gender in English names, there are consequently many ways of quantifying how "gendered" a name is. Your instructor will assign you one gender scale and one country, and you will determine whether the **average gender score** for male names and female names has changed over time in that country. You will need to assign one gender score to every name, and then calculate an average score for each sex in each year. Names have been sorted alphabetically to allow you to score them more efficiently, and you can calculate averages by sex and year easily using the `=AVERAGEIFS()` command.

### Ways of scoring gender

#### 1. Final phoneme: detailed characteristics

Barry & Harper (1995) devised the following "gender scale" which they use to score how masculine or feminine a name is based on its final sound. Barry & Harper's scale is as follows:



#### 2. Final phoneme: coarse characteristics

We can simplify Barry & Harper's gender scale as follows:

- +1 point: The final sound of the name is a vowel.
- 0 points: The final sound of the name is a consonant.

#### 3. Syllable count

Barry & Harper's scale does not take number of syllables into account, but this has been found (Cutler et al. 1990) to be an important characteristic differentiating male and female names in English. We can create a syllable-count scale as follows:

+4 points: The name is tetrasyllabic

+3 points: The name is trisyllabic

+2 points: The name is disyllabic

+1 point: The name is monosyllabic

### **References**

Barry, Herbert, and Aylene S. Harper. 1995. Increased choice of female phonetic attributes in first names. *Sex Roles* 32:809–819.

Cutler, Anne, James McQueen, and Ken Robinson. 1990. Elizabeth and John: Sound patterns of men's and women's names. *Journal of Linguistics* 26:471–482.