First Names as Signs of Personal Identity: An Intercultural Comparison

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1. PERSONAL IDENTITY

What hides behind the label «personal identity»? Personal identity can be defined and assessed in many different ways. Self-representation, self-recognition, self-descriptions, self-esteem, self-awareness, self-knowledge, and so on are often all subsumed under the same construct: identity. Genealogical perspectives — that focused on the history of subjectivity — have shown how some of these aspects should be seen as the *result* of certain practices applied throughout the history of humanity — and, therefore, not as inherent traits. As Vernant (1989), for example, has shown for Ancient Greece, the singularity of the individual, the expression of such singularity by the individual, and the internal dialogue of the individual appear as successive stages in the development of the self or of so-called «personal identity». Naming processes must have played an important role in the very first moments of the history of «individualization» (Who has the right to have a name, how is it composed, what does it designate, etc.?). Be it as it may, in a general way we can say that personal identity refers to the aspects that make us unique and distinguishable from others (biological givens, significant identifications, meaningful social roles; Kroger & Adair, 2008). Our given name is one of the aspects that contributes to this uniqueness. Salvatore and Valsiner (in press, p. 7) pointed out that «in order to say that something [or someone] is unique one needs a frame of reference defining the distribution of variability so that assertion of uniqueness is possible.» The social and cultural context is therefore essential for identity development.

Personal identity is not a given entity but a process; it is constantly under construction through interaction with others and with ourselves. New aspects are added, old ones questioned, others stabilized (see Identity Control Theory; Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997). Nevertheless, already Erikson (1995) said that — with an optimal sense of identity — an individual experiences sameness and continuity across time and space. A contradiction? Not if we distinguish the changing structure from the meaning making processes that allow the individual to experience sameness and continuity. For capturing this process, Wiley (1994, p.53) speaks of the *semiotic self* or *self-identity*, which he defines as follows:

> Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography. Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent.

Being a self thus means to be in the process of becoming a self (Colapietro, 1989). Since the individual does not develop within a vacuum, he or she is confronted with social signs that influence meaning making processes. Nevertheless, the individual is not a passive recipient of social signs, but rather actively involved (Andacht & Michel, 2005) in the construction of meanings. The individual interprets and is interpreted by others (interpretants). On the one side, the individual is thus knowable externally, but, on the other hand, can also interprets him- or herself as «other» — always as part of a cultural and social context.

> The construal of thought as an inner dialogue of the self across time is the natural outcome of its semiotic functioning. Peirce describes this mechanism as a conversation wherein the

self of the present — the 'I' role — addresses the self of the future as if it were a 'You', in a similar fashion as if it were addressing others (Andacht & Michael, 2005, p.63)

Wiley (1994) extends this dialogue to a trialogue between Me, I, and You, in which the Me is to represent the past self. The *contents* of these trialogues — an exemplary is depicted in Figure 1 — can be manifold and represent the different identity facets (=[changing] structural aspects).
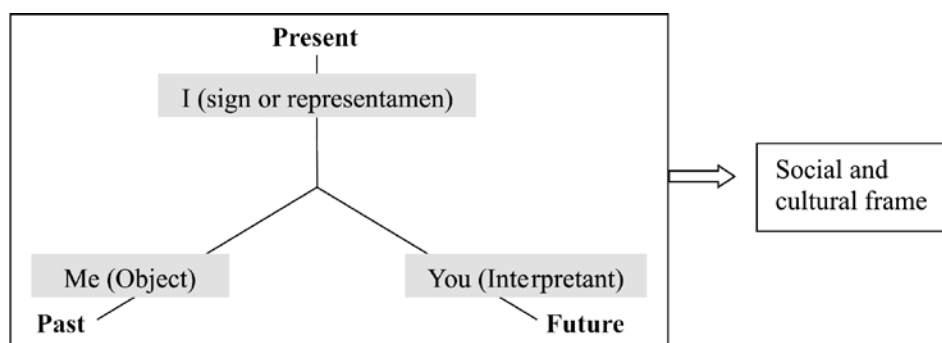

FIGURE 1: WILEY'S (1994) CONCEPT OF THE INNER SPEECH OF THE SELF WITHIN A CERTAIN FRAMEWORK

We thus see an individual that, through internal trialogues, manages to negotiate his or her personal identity by comparing the status quo with how this person used to and wants to be. These meaning making processes help to maintain a sense of sameness and continuity (connection of past, present, and future) despite structural variability.

2. NAMES AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

Names can be considered (semantic/verbal) labels which both identify and distinguish an individual from other individuals. Like, for example, totemism, they are used to differentiate and forge relationships among individuals and groups (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Allport (1937, as cited in Joubert, 1993) described a person's name as the most important anchor point of identity; Walton (1937, as cited in Joubert, 1993) even considers it a determining factor in personality development (see Lawson, 1987, for an research overview).

Names stand for the person (or other objects) and trigger associations with that person (see Gargiulo, 2007, for an example how names constitute another object: professions). Names can thus, on the one hand, be interpreted as signs in the semiotic context (or rhematic indexical legisigns in Peirce's terminology[1]; Weber, 2008), and, on the other hand, be discussed in the

[1] A legisign «is usually made by men. Every conventional sign is a legisign […]. It is not a single object, but a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant. Every legisign signifies through an instance of its application, which may be termed a Replica of it […]» (Peirce, n.d., as cited in Weber, 2008, p.350). With *indexical,* Peirce stresses that a name can also be affected by its object (interaction). *Rhematic* refers to the fact that a name can neither be false or true, it is a sign of «qualitative possibility» (Weber, 2008, p. 353).

above described inner trialogue as one self-defining aspect. This leads to a semiotic prism (as depicted in Figure 2), which has already been described by, for example, Zittoun (2006).
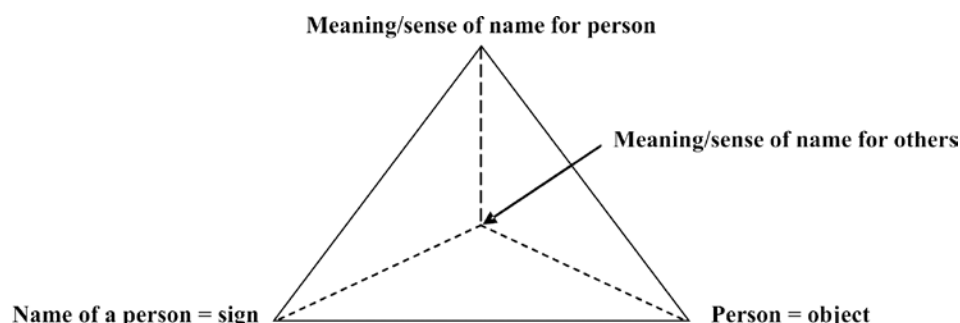

FIGURE 2: The semiotic prism: The person as the object and the name as the sign, the latter being interpreted by the object itself (self under construction) and the environment

In this model, the meaning of the name is not static. The individual can re-negotiate his or her identity and with it the meaning of his or her name at any given point in time (examples follow below), but also the meaning perceived by others changes. First impressions are gathered at the first encounter with a person (indexical encounter). The name is, thereafter, used as a symbol for this person, who — in reference to the first impression — we learn more about and thus get to know better.

For the proper name itself, three types of significance can be differentiated (Nikonov, 1974, as cited in Bagby & Sigalov, 1987): (1) its etymological meaning, (2) the name's signifying meaning (function of the proper name as label), and (3) its social meaning representing the symbolism of a name that has acquired historical meaning within a given culture. Bagby and Sigalov (1987) point out that all proper names have signifying meaning, which therefore becomes the most important in the trialogical emergence of the self. For some the etymological significance is known, but must be restored in most cases, and in the very rare ones names actually possess symbolic cultural meaning. The latter is sometimes intentionally used in literature when names become iconographic sign as in Tolstoj's «The Cossacks» (cp. Bagby & Sigaliv, 1987). Herzfeld (1982) gives another example when he describes the Greek procedure of choosing baptismal names. He reveals the underlying ideology of commemorative naming as reciprocity, in which choices about whom to recognize as a benefactor play an important role. He shows how implicit rules allow for a «strategic and selective expression of social alignments» (Herzfeld, 1982, p.288). The adjustment of genealogical history to current social experience thus is reflected in the names given.

On the one hand, names as signs have a long established meaning expected to define or somehow impregnate the person carrying them — even if they are created ad hoc, since these creations also follow a conventional system. Research findings support the assumption that names have certain associated stereotypes (Joubert, 1993), which can, for example, be evaluated with the help of the factors Evaluation, Potency, and Activity (Hartmann, 1985). These stereotypes are believed to affect the perception of the name bearer, but research findings are ambiguous (Joubert, 1993).

On the other hand, the new object the sign stands for will in turn enrich or transform the sign itself. In an associative act, children are sometimes given the names of a famous forebear, a spirit, a saint, or kinsperson. The parents might project the forebear's characteristics onto their child and hope for similarities. Nevertheless, they will not treat their child a «mere epiphany of the namesake»; on the contrary, the child will fill the name with a new meaning (identity) so that it gradually displaces «its previous bearers in living memory» (Herzfeld, 1982, p.289).

In some cases, however, the person might not at all identify with the sign and its established meaning, so that he or she chooses to alter the sign. Knafo (1991), who also considers the case of Anna Freud, describes how the offspring of famous parents sometimes struggles with establishing a mature sense of identity, because — while carrying their parents' name — they do not manage to step out of their shadow. This effect is even stronger, when the «famous parent» is of the same sex as the child. A name change might be one solution to escape the struggle described. Name changes of this sort have to be differentiated from name changes that mark developmental stages (see Beidelman, 1974, who describes series of Kaguru names [Tanzania] that mark the cycle of development from birth to death); giving up one's maiden name when getting married is one possible example. Sean John Combs can serve as another example, since he used and uses the names Diddy, P. Diddy, Puff Daddy, Puffy, or Bad Boy to either stress the focus of his work (rapper, producer, or designer) or to mark changes in development. Marketing reasons must certainly also be considered.

In any of the above described cases, the social context cannot be neglected, since names do not only make a statement about the recipient's identity; the subsequent use of the names in address and reference shows how an identity is acknowledged or challenged by others.

3. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE NAMING PROCESS

An extensive body of ethnographic, anthropological, and sociolinguistic literature exists that examines formal naming systems, e.g., motivations and consequences of culture-specific name-giving practices, the use of names in address and reference, the significance of nicknames, and the relationship between names and other social designators (kinship terminology) (e.g., Verswijver, 1984; Feinberg, 1982; McDowell, 1981; Beidelmann, 1974; Kidd, 1906). In this study, we will focus on different naming processes in different cultures and their effects on the functioning of the semiotic prism. We wonder whether the dynamics within the prism — the kind and valence of the meanings, their interactions, and especially the relation between the person and his or her first name (identification with the name) — are affected by the naming procedures.

3.1 The naming process
Naming an object is

> to erase part of its mystery; to classify it in an overall system is to familiarize it; to establish correspondences based on differences, similarities, and analogies is […] the explanatory process par excellence (Battestini, 1991, p.106).

The naming process varies widely between different cultures. Battestini (1991) describes, for example, how the naming process is the function of an intercessor (priest, headman, or diviner) for the Efik, a people in Nigeria. In today's Western societies (Brazil, the States, Germany, and Spain fall into this category), children are mostly named based on parents' personal criteria and characteristics (e.g., educational level; Lieberson & Bell, 1992), usually choosing a name from a more or less established cultural heritage (see Zittoun, 2005, for an in depth analysis). Dunkling (1986) points out that, nowadays, there are fashions in name usage as they are fashions in other areas of life, which might also be one reason for the decline in the use of names drawn from within the family in the early 19th century (study in MA, USA; Smith, 1985). Especially the frequency with which names occur influences their perception and liking: Common names are usually liked more than uncommon ones (Joubert, 1993; Capps, 1985). In addition, the sex of the person is not to be neglected. Research also shows that boys' names are more tradition-bound than girls' names, and that phonemic factors and novelty is more important for the selection of girls' names than for those of boys (Joubert, 1993).

Instead of personal criteria, specific rules for naming a child are more prevalent in, for example, Asian societies. These rules can be related to facts such as the totems and families trees, the date and time of birth, or events that happened during or after pregnancy. In South Korea, one of the participating countries in this study, some parents create the name for their child as soon as time, date, month, and year of his or her birth are known. Experts (fortune tellers) are consulted to help the parents with the name selection — a procedure that can incorporate the child's *saju* into the naming process. *Saju* reflects a person's fortune based on the determinants mentioned above (similar to astrology). Nevertheless, not all Korean parents rely on their child's *saju* to create a name. Other traditions are applied as well, for example, indicating the generation a child belongs to by certain letters that are either part of the first or second syllable of the given name (most Korean names have two syllables), or having the fortune teller read the child's facial features to find a name that suits well. Of course, there are also parents who choose their children's first names without relying on any traditions.

In China, the second Asian country that participates in this study, personal names consist of a surname (mostly monosyllabic) which is followed by a given name (mono- or disyllabic). The given name usually encodes the parents' expectations, wishes, or in some cases, religious inclinations as well as generation indicators. In traditional Chinese culture, names were used to mark important social transitions — mainly for men who enter social adulthood. For this, men needed to have at least two names, but most had more. In contrast, village women sometimes even stayed nameless (Watson, 1986). Chao (1956, as cited in Li, 1997) suggests that a Chinese full name (surname plus given name) has the linguistic status of a compound word, sometimes reflecting the dominant political ideology at the time (e.g.; *Wensheng* which means *born during the Cultural Revolution*; Li, 1997, p. 493). Li (1997) states that, nowadays, numerous software packages exist that guide Chinese parents through the naming process and help select a name that is «customized» for their child. In Western societies, the influence of modern technologies can be observed in the establishment of websites that offer name collections or hit lists of the most popular names at the time.

It seems important to understand that the word «name» already triggers different implications and considerations in different cultures. The counterpart of the word name in Chinese is *ming*. Li (1997) argues that classical Chinese philosophers rather concentrated on the model function (*referent*) of names than their descriptive meanings. Chinese philosophers thus specified what kinds of behavior, or referents, constitute the designata of words (names) like emperor, father, etc. «Accordingly, they thought that an emperor should behave like an emperor, a father should behave like a father, and so forth» (Li, 1997, p.490). It is likely that these philosophical approaches affected and effect the way proper names were and are chosen.

3.2 Globalization and its effects

In Hong Kong, we can observe how the encounter of different cultures influences the naming process. The structures in interpersonal communication in China usually are hierarchical. Communicating with people from more egalitarian cultures thus needs adaptation. By adopting Western-style English names (borrowed identities), many Chinese Honkongers try to facilitate the communication with Westerners and among themselves (Eberhard, 1970), because these names allow for more intimacy. They speed up the process of becoming acquainted — which is not only an advantage in personal, but also business relations. Li (1997) states that changes like the one describes above cannot only be observed in Hong Kong. Similar phenomena have been described for many Yoruba-speaking communities in West Africa. At Clark University, the same phenomenon is noticeable: New Korean students, for example, introduce themselves first with their Korean names, but then add that the others can address them with their Western names, which are easier to pronounce and remember.

3.3 The special case of nicknaming

The English term *nickname* comes from the Middle English «an eke name» which translates into «another name.» Nicknames thus stand in opposition to other naming conventions (see 3.1, McDowell, 1981). Morgan, O'Neill, and Harre (1979) suggested that nicknames can be understood as (a) norm; (b) form of social control, (c) form of status, or (d) an insult. For the examination of nicknames in the Kamsá community, McDowell (1981) differentiated between the scope and sense (signifying meaning, see 2.) of the nicknames. The *scope* describes the sociological boundaries of name use. A nickname might be only applied by a certain group of people. The nickname can be sarcastic or sincere, but in any case, the individual, who is the bearer of the nickname, can identify with or reject it — which by no means must influence the use of it by others. Searle (1969) suggested that proper names often lack descriptive content (*sense*) — at least in Western societies. This deficiency is overcome by a descriptive backing, meaning that an identifying description is added. This description usually is a social composite «rather than a single set replicated intact throughout society» (McDowell, 1981, p.7). In nicknames, he supposes, these identifying descriptions can rise to the surface, when they are, for example, «humorous or derogatory appellations attached to the name bearer through fortuitous circumstance» (McDowell, 1981, p.1). A person can thus acquire a nickname under different circumstances and at different points in time — the naming process is therefore not as regulated or even institutionalized as in the case of proper names and differs between the various cultures and ethnicities (e.g., Glazier, 1987; Eberhard, 1970).

4. THE CURRENT STUDY: AN INTERCULTURAL COMPARISON

The current study was triggered by discussing the different naming processes in the home countries of the researchers. These discussions lead to the assumption that differences in the naming process followed by different families in different cultures may influence the degree with which individuals identify with their first names. We assumed that if the name was created for an individual, thus being very personalized, the identification with this name would be higher.

With the help of an online questionnaire that was first constructed in English and later translated into Chinese, Korean, German, Portuguese, and Spanish, we are testing this and further hypotheses.

4.1 Description of questionnaire

We posted the link to the project's homepage on University web pages, forums, and mailing lists in the participating countries. When clicking on the link, the participants were first lead to a page on which they only chose the language in which they wanted to participate.

On the second page, they were given a short description of the study (goals, responsible institution, confidentiality, approx. time, etc.), after which they could decide whether they wanted to fill out the questionnaire itself (third to fifth page). The online questionnaire consisted of three sections:

- ▸ *sociodemographic background* (9 questions; sex, age, ethnic background, etc.),
- ▸ *first names* (13 main questions plus sub-questions; who chose it, how was it chosen, like/ dislike, fit/does not fit, etymological meaning, signifying meaning, wish to change name, ambiguousness concerning gender, mispronunciation/misspelling, etc.),
- ▸ and *nicknames* (4 main questions plus sub-questions; existence, emergence, usage, preference in comparison to other names, etc.).

Answers could be typed in as text (open questions) or — when given options existed (closed questions) — checked in the form of radio buttons (if one answer had to be chosen) or checkboxes (if multiple answers were allowed). The data was sent directly to a MySQL data base and was later exported to Excel, SPSS, or Atlas.ti (text files). In this paper, we will present an excerpt of the first findings, which are mainly based on the quantitative data assessed.

4.2 Participants

So far, 1759 participants have filled out the questionnaire: 1192 from Germany, 380 from Brazil, 91 from the United States or other English speaking countries, 68 from Korea, 20 from Spain, and 8 from China. Due to the mixed background of the English-speaking participants and the low number of participants from China and Spain (further recruitment is necessary), we will only analyze the data from Germany, Brazil, and Korea in this paper. In all three countries, the participation of males and females differed significantly (Chi-Square=226.5; p<0.001; only for 9 participants, the sex was unknown). The German sample consisted of 82.1% females (N=973) and 17.9% males (N=212), the Brazilian sample of 43.1% males (N=163) and 56.9% females (N=215), and the Korean sample of 54.4% males (N=37) and 45.6% females (N=31). Since gender differences in identification with ones own name(s) are possible, we decided to reduce

the number of female participants in the German sample by randomly selecting 212 of the 973 participants. This way, the distribution of females and males became comparable between the three countries (Chi-Square=5.3; p=0.072).

The mean age of the selected participants was 29.6 years in Brazil (SD=10.7), 27.0 years in Germany (SD=8.4), and 22.8 in Korea (SD=3.9). Korean participants were thus significantly younger than the ones from Brazil and Germany (F[2]=18.27; p<0.001); possible effects have to be discussed.

4.3 First results: How were the first names chosen/made?

Due to the small sample in Korea, results must be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, the tentative results support our assumption that the naming procedures differ in the three countries (see Table 1).

In Korea the majority of parents still rely on professional name makers, whereas in Germany and Brazil the majority of participants do not know much about the origin of their first names. Nevertheless, two thirds of the Korean participants did *not* consult a professional name maker, and one fourth did not know where their first names come from. These observations might reflect the Westernization of Asian countries and the disappearance of traditions, which has to be taken into account when discussing the results of this study.

TABLE 1: Origin/Sources of the first names in the different countries

	% in country		
	Brazil	**Germany**	**Korea**
professional name maker (created)	--	--	**33.3**
variation of a current name, stylized (created)	3.0	--	--
hope/liking of parents	13.3	18.7	16.6
family tradition/ taken from a family member	14.6	15.7	25.0
suggested by a member of the family (uncle, brother, or grandparent)	2,7	--	--
don't know	**31.4**	**35.7**	25.0
taken from media (movies, novels, songs/singers, etc.)**	17.9	11.5*	--
taken from special name books	0.8	8.2	--
taken from circle of friends/acquaintances	6.0	5.6	--
rarity/modernity as determining factor	--	4.3	--
religious reasons	6.5	4.3	--
other reasons	3.8	4.9	--

* 3 German participants said that their parents took their names from the end titles of a movie

** includes names taken from famous historical role models (philosophers, emperors, etc.)

4.4 First results: Gender ambiguity in the three different countries

Gender ambiguity was assessed with the help of two questions: (a) «How likely is that your name can be given to a person of opposite gender?» and (b) «Do(es) your first name(s) indicate clearly whether you are female or male (in the country where you live)?». Significant differences between the countries were found in both cases ([a]: Chi-Square[4]=149.9; p<0.001; see Figures 3 / [b]: Chi-Square[2]=37.8; p<0.001; see Figure 4).
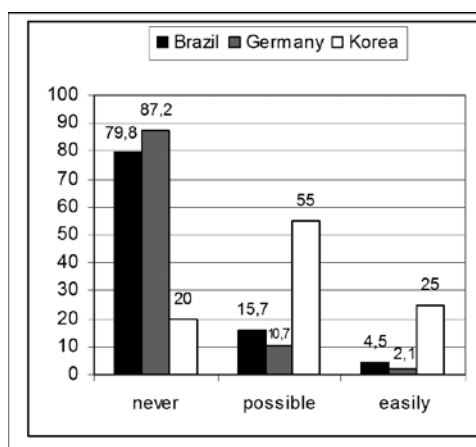
FIGURE 3: QUESTION (A),
FREQUENCIES OF ANSWERS IN %
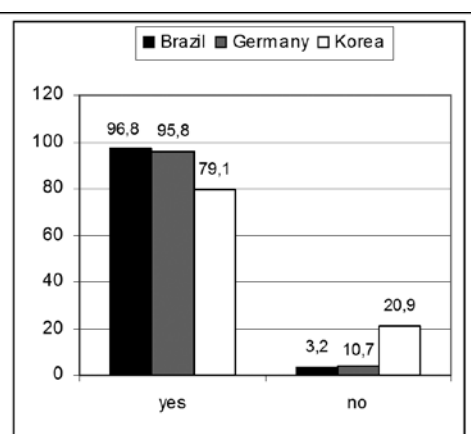
FIGURE 4: QUESTION (B),
FREQUENCIES OF ANSWERS IN %

In both cases, first names in Korea are more ambiguous than in Germany and Brazil.

4.5 First results: Identification with name

We decided against the direct question: «Do you identify with your name?», because of the ambiguity of the concept. In the semiotic context, *identification* is sometimes used synonym for *sign*, whereas *identity* then stands for the *object* (Wisse, 2006). In this study, we broaden the meaning of identification and define it as the extent to which an individual thinks that his or her first name reflects part of himself or herself (accepts the first name as a sign for him/her as object). For the assessment and to guide the participants' meaning making processes, we defined different indicators for identification, which were the following:

 ‣   Does the person like his or her name?
 ‣   Does she or he think the name fits her or him?
 ‣   Did the person ever think of changing his or her name?
 ‣   Does the mispronunciation or misspelling of the name bother the person?

The assumption is that an individual who identifies with his or her name in the above described sense would (a) like his/her first name, (b) think that is fits him/her well, (c) not think about changing it, and (d) would be bothered by mispronunciation or misspelling, because this would equal an unauthorized alteration of the accepted sign. Of course, the used concepts are also not completely unambiguous (e.g., what does «liking» mean?), but less so than the overarching concept of identification. Limitations will, nevertheless, be discussed.

Liking one's name

First we examined whether Germans, Brazilians, and Koreans differed in how much they liked their first names: Brazilians like their names the most, Germans dislike them the most, Koreans more often answer in a neutral way, they less often say explicitly that they like their names (Chi-Square[4]=16.8; p<0.01) (see Figure 5).
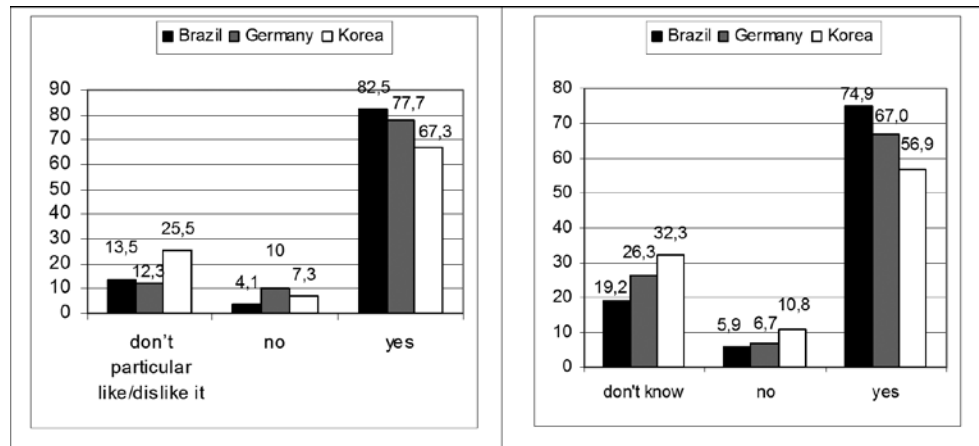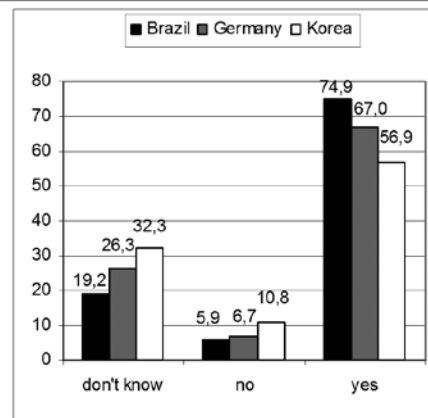

FIGURE 5: LIKING ONE'S NAME(S), ANSWERS IN %

FIGURE 6: FITTING OF ONE'S NAME(S); ANSWERS IN %

Thinking that the name fits

In addition, we asked the participants if their name(s) suit them (fit well) (see Figure 6). Again, significant results were found (Chi-Square[4]=12.4; p<0.05): Koreans and Germans state more often than Brazilians that they do not know whether their name(s) suit them. In addition, Koreans more often think that their name(s) do not fit them well than the Germans and Brazilians. Brazilians identify most with their first names by stating that their names do fit them well.
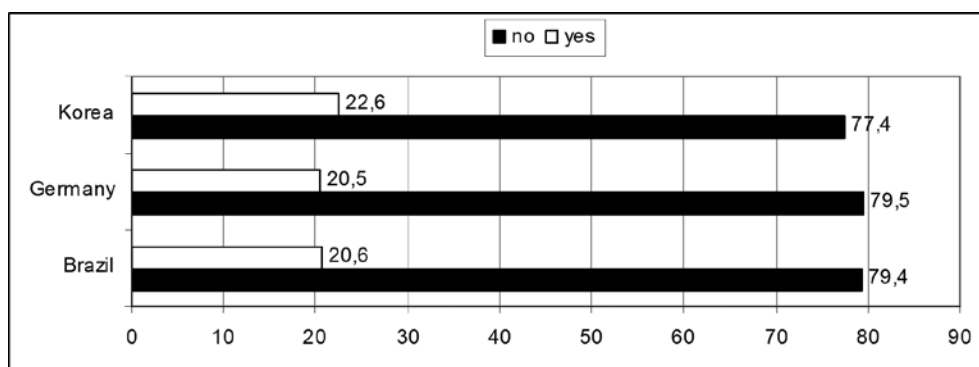
Wanting to change the name

FIGURE 7: ANSWERS IN % TO THE QUESTION: DID YOU EVER THINK OF CHANGING YOUR FIRST NAME(S)?

When it comes to thinking about a possible name change, the participants of the three countries do not differ significantly (see Figure 7) (Chi-Square[2]=0.45; p=0.80). About 20%

have at least thought about it. We also asked, if the participants have acted on this thought: None of the Korean participants actually changed their first names, 3.5% of the Germans (N=35), and 4.8% of the Brazilians (N=18) did. Differences are not significant though (Chi-Square[2]=3.66; p=0.16).

Mispronunciation

When asked how often other people mispronounce their names, participants from the three countries differ significantly (Chi-Square[6]=54.1; p<0.001): About one third of the Brazilians and Koreans state that their first name(s) are (very) often mispronounced.
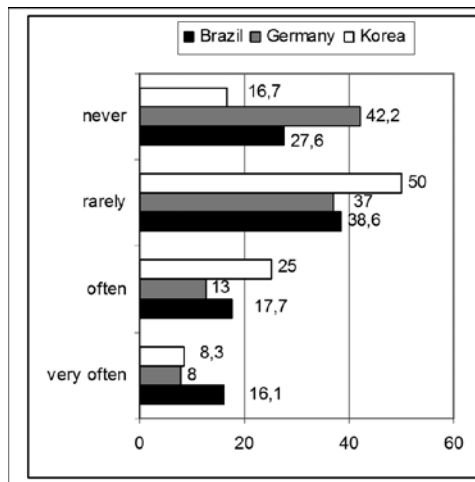

FIGURE 8: How often do other people mispronounce your name? (answers in %)
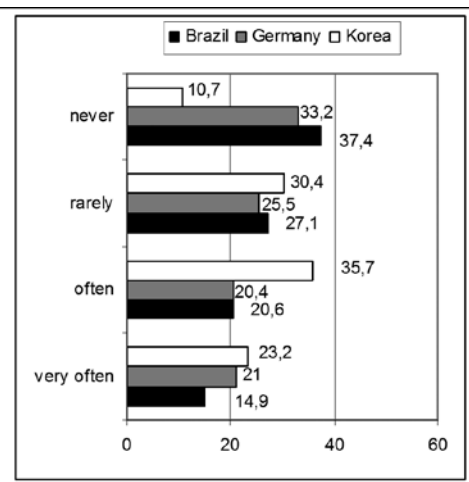
FIGURE 9: How often do you feel the need to correct them? (answers in %)

In Germany, less than 25% claim the same. Remarkable is that the Koreans again choose the less extreme options (rarely, often), whereas the Brazilians and Germans are more likely to also select the extremes (never, very often).

The indicator for identification was the degree to which the participants are bothered by mispronunciations. We asked the following: «Do you feel the need to correct them [comment: those that mispronounce the name]?». Again, we found significant differences between the three countries (see Figure 9) (Chi-Square[6]=22.55; p=0.01]: Brazilians are less likely to correct someone than participants from the other two countries, especially Koreans would correct a person who mispronounces their first name(s).

Misspelling

The three countries also differ, when asked how often people misspell their first name(s) (see Figure 10) (Chi-Square[6]=20.65; p<0.01): About one third of Germans and Koreans say that others misspell their names (very) often, in Brazil almost half (45.8%) state the same. When it comes to the need for corrections, the three countries also differ (Chi-Square[6]=33.14; p<0.001) (see Figure 11).
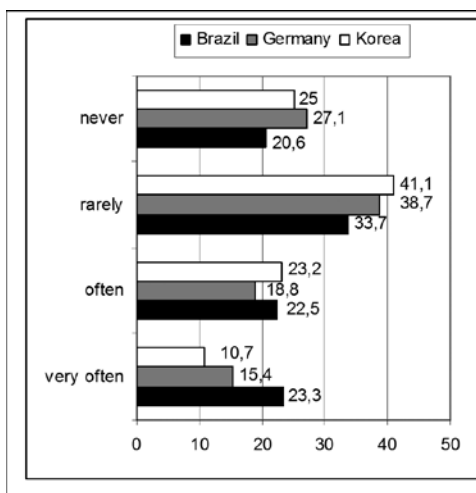
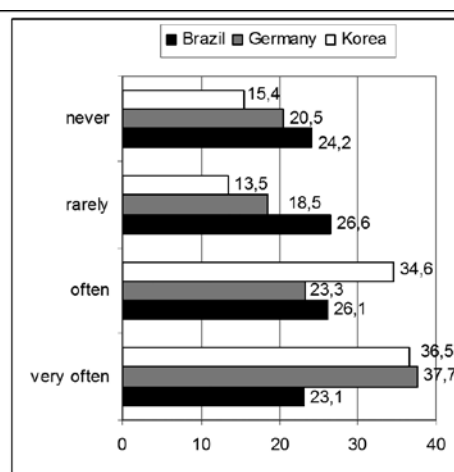FIGURE 10: How often do other people misspell your name? (answers in %)

FIGURE 11: How often do you feel the need to correct them? (answers in %)

Again, the Brazilians are the least likely to correct someone who misspells their first name(s) when compared to Germans and Koreans. Koreans, especially, stress that they would correct someone who misspells their first name(s). These results confirm those for mispronunciations.

4.6 First results: Comparisons of nicknames and first names

In addition to the questions described in 4.5, we asked those participants, who had a nickname (Brazil: N=253; Germany: N=262; Korea: N=41), the following two questions: (a) «Among all your names (including your first name/s), which one do you like best?» and (b) «Among all your names (including your first name/s), which one do you think fits best?». Again, the three countries differed significantly in the answers given (see Figures 12 & 13).
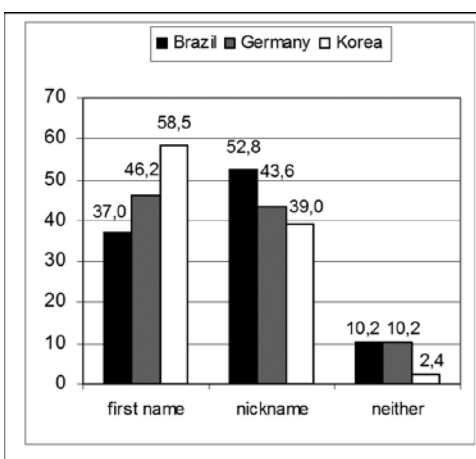

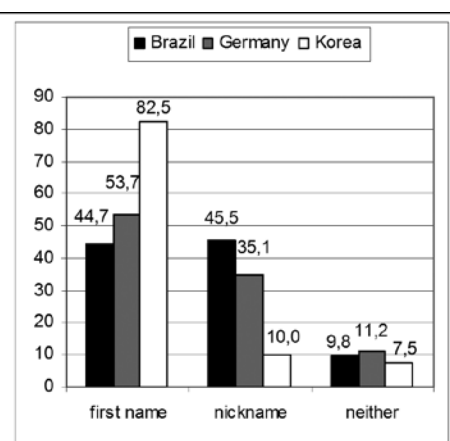FIGURE 12: Which name do you like best? Answers in %

FIGURE 13: Which name fits best? Answers in %

Brazilians prefer their nicknames in contrast to Germans and Koreans, who both prefer their first names (Chi-Square[4]=10.2; p<0.05). When asked which names fit best, Koreans especially stress that their first names do, whereas Brazilians more often say that their nicknames fit them best. Germans also tend to think that their first names fit best, but do not stress this fact as much as Koreans (Chi-Square[4]=22.7; p<0.001).

4.7 First conclusions

We do find the assumed differences in naming procedures between the three countries, but they are less pronounced than expected. It seems as if traditions like consulting a professional name maker have become less important in Korea. This assumption has to be tested with a larger sample though.

Our main assumption was that due to different naming processes in the different countries (Korea, Brazil, and Germany being the countries for which we already had enough data to analyze), individuals would differ in the way they identify with their first name(s). We used different indicators to assess identification. Indeed, significant differences were found (for an overview see Table 2).

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS

Indicator	Country	Brazil	Germany	Korea
likes first name(s)*		+ (~)	+ (~) (-)	+ (~)
thinks first name(s) fit*		+ (~)	+ (~)	+ (~) (-)
thought of changing first name(s)		− (+)	− (+)	− (+)
feels the need to correct people (mispronunciation)*		− (+)	− / +	+ (-)
feels the need to correct people (misspelling)*		− (+)	+ (-)	+ (-)

+ = agreement; - = disagreement; ~ = neutral → the answer of the majority is displayed without parentheses; the threshold for an answer category to be displayed was 10%; * = group differences are significant

Overall, Koreans stay more neutral in their evaluations (liking/fitting) than Germans and Brazilians, especially. This response behavior might be influenced by cultural differences in the sense that «being humble», as our Korean colleagues put it, is of greater value in Korea than in Germany and Brazil. Differences that might be caused by this self-restriction shall thus not be over-interpreted.

In all countries, about one fifth of the participants have occasionally thought about changing their first name(s), but only a minority has acted on this thought. Differences are not significant, but it will be interesting to examine whether — with a larger sample — still none of the Koreans changed their first name(s). It is possible that the greater gender neutrality (no gender boundaries) of Korean names allows for a broader identification so that name changes become less often necessary.

The majority of the participants in all countries like their first name(s) and think that these names fit them well. In Germany, the likelihood of finding participants that do not like

their first name(s) is higher than in the other two countries, whereas the likelihood for finding participants that do not think their first name(s) fit them well is higher in Korea. It is possible that the liking (affective aspect) plays a more important role in Germany, because the meaning of the name (cognitive aspect) is less obvious than in Korea, where the meaning is essential in most naming processes and more easily recognized by others. Brazilians seem to engage less often in this inner dialogue about first name(s). The meaning of first name(s) seems to be more peripheral than in the other countries, which is supported by the lacking need to correct someone who mispronounces or misspells their first name(s) (see Table 2) and the preference of nicknames (see Table 3).

Table 3: Overview of the results: Preferences of names (answers of majority)

Question	Country	Brazil	Germany	Korea
Which of the names do you like best?*		nick name	both	first name
Which of the names do you think fits best?*		both	first name	first name

* = group differences are significant

Koreans stress the most that they feel the need to correct someone, if mispronunciation or misspelling occurs. This results points into our assumed direction that Koreans identify most with their first names. Our qualitative data, which is, yet, to be analyzed, will shed light on the reasons for these findings. We have to consider that not only the naming procedures, but the use of the first name(s) is possible explanations. In Korea, the first name is only one possible way among others to address someone — and not always the most appropriate. Titles (Prof., Dr., etc.) and kinship terms (mother, grandfather, etc.) might be more polite to use, depending on the age, kind of relationship, and social position with/of the counterpart (Hoji, 1991). Thus, the first name is incorporated in a much broader system that not influences identities, but identities within certain hierarchies. The name as a sign, or in this case symbol, is charged with diverse meanings.

Nicknames have to be considered a special case. Although — according to our Korean colleagues — nicknames used to be of significance displaying the social position and characteristics of their bearers, this function is now less prevalent to non-existent in younger Korean generations. Since our Korean sample is part of this younger generation (see *sample description*), it is likely that they see nicknames only as a tool to tease people, something that is limited to the group of peers outside the hierarchical system. In Brazil and Germany, nicknames seem to be more established in everyday life. They are more broadly used and, thus, have a more central function for identity, which is reflected in the fact that about one third of the Germans and almost half of the Brazilians think that their nicknames fit better than their first names. Brazilians even like their nicknames more than their first names. It is likely that nicknames display intimacy in less hierarchical systems. Nicknaming someone appropriately requires knowing the person well. The nickname is then based on displayed characteristics rather than on anticipated characteristics like in the case of *saju*. Identification seems to be facilitated in this case. Again, our qualitative data that is to be analyzed will help verify these interpretations.

4.8 Outlook

Most importantly, first names seem to play a significant role in marking social status/ranks/ relationships. A better understanding of the underlying semiotic processes can therefore help facilitating interpersonal and intercultural exchange.

With this study, we have only started to examine the underlying mechanisms — first by showing that differences between the three examined countries exist. The results, which are not completely conclusive, point in the assumed direction, but only with the help of qualitative analysis will we be able to grasp the underlying meaning making processes.

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