

# Simple (non-organized) name management: Knowledge about and attitudes towards family names and first names among university students in Nitra/Nyitra

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, the knowledge of university students in Nitra about their first names and family names is described on the basis of a questionnaire survey: whether they know the meaning and origin of their own names, whether they know when their name days are celebrated, but also how common they think their names are, and how they are addressed and nicknamed. In addition to knowledge about personal names, students' attitudes towards their own names are discussed. Since the survey was conducted among university students in Nitra, a brief description of the teaching of onomastics at the institute is also provided. Previous attitude surveys regarding names are also reviewed, some of which have assessed the knowledge about and attitudes towards names of Hungarian university and high school students in Slovakia. In the present study, besides the aforementioned onomastic phenomena, the motives for naming and name changes are also touched upon, both of which can be related to name management, a concept clarified in the introduction. The naming issues covered in the survey can be discussed in the university programs of the institute and can be incorporated into the curriculum, so these issues are also briefly addressed at the end of the paper.

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Names of settlements are given in their official Slovak and traditional Hungarian forms, separated with slashes, throughout this paper.

**KEYWORDS**

name management, onomastics, family name, personal name, naming, name frequency, attitudes towards names

**INTRODUCTION**

Name management is the field of applied onomastics. [Lanstyák \(2018\)](#) includes naming and changing names in name management. Name management also covers the management of proper names in concrete life situations, so the field is also related to the knowledge about names and onomastics. Name choice itself can also be placed in its context, since when parents choose a first name for their child at birth, they are engaging in simple (non-organized) name management ([Bauko, 2021a](#), p. 24). Name bearing is also a name management activity: the name bearer uses his or her own name mostly in a meta-linguistic sense, e.g. when introducing themselves. In this respect, it is not related to name use, but rather to name giving, since name bearing labels the linguistic act from the point of view of the person who received the name. Name giving is a one-time event, while name bearing is a permanent state ([Lanstyák, 2015](#), p. 46). I will discuss the students' knowledge about naming, name change, and name bearing in the analysis section of this paper, also touching on other onomastic issues (e.g. the meaning and origin of family names and first names, name frequency, names used in addressing, nicknames, knowledge about name days, and attitudes to names, etc.). Based on the above, the term 'name management' can also include the promotion and expansion of knowledge of onomastics, and these will therefore also be discussed in this paper.

Onomastics is the field of linguistics dealing with proper names. "In the works on onomastics published in recent decades, the need to include onomastics in the educational process has been expressed more and more often" ([F. Lánicz, 2016](#), p. 47). Unfortunately, teaching about names is only indirectly included in the Hungarian educational system. In primary and secondary school textbooks, names, name bearing, and naming trends are discussed as part of the study of parts of speech, in the context of proper names ([Raátz, 2015](#), p. 238). However, due to its interdisciplinary nature, onomastics can be used in a wide range of educational contexts. Since proper names often occur in the school subjects that correspond to the disciplines concerned, onomastics provides an excellent opportunity to discuss them in other subjects (e.g. geography, history, biology, regional education, etc.). For example, in civics lessons, the connection between language and name policy, in history lessons the common names of rulers, in Hungarian language lessons the naming practices of authors can be discussed ([F. Lánicz, 2016](#), p. 47; [Angyal, 2021](#)). [Kecskés \(2018\)](#) emphasizes that onomastics links disciplines and school subjects, conveying complex knowledge. She summarizes those directions that have been followed in attempts to link onomastics to issues of the curriculum, discussing the treatment of onomastic issues in the new generation textbooks and workbooks used in grades 5 through 12, and also reviewing the draft National Core Curriculum<sup>2</sup> from the perspective of onomastics ([Kecskés, 2018](#)). Onomastics experts are also concerned with the issue of finding room for knowledge

<sup>2</sup>The National Core Curriculum (*Nemzeti Alaptanterv*, NAT, in Hungarian) is one of the fundamental, content-regulating documents of education in Hungary.

about proper names in textbooks: should onomastics appear as a stand-alone subject or as part of grammar? Hajdú (1994) wrote a stand-alone textbook on Hungarian proper names for secondary school students, while Fercsik (2014) produced a workbook about first names. In her study, Takács (2022) examines the scope and types of tasks through which information about product and brand names appears in the textbooks and workbooks of primary school grades 3, 4 and 6. She also points out that in primary and secondary education, proper names are only used as material for teaching, for example, spelling (Takács, 2022).

In Hungarian primary and secondary schools in Slovakia, students usually only learn about proper names in connection with spelling and parts of speech (Bauko, 2011, p. 40). No publication similar to the Hungarian textbooks in onomastics for secondary school students has yet been published in Slovakia, however, a teaching aid for university students already has (cf. Bauko, 2015).

The study of knowledge about and attitudes towards names has been highlighted by several experts in onomastics (e.g. Bauko, 2004, 2009a,b; Gelegonyáné Katona, 2015; Angyal, 2023; Raátz, 1994; Liszka, 1997).

## THE TEACHING OF ONOMASTICS AT THE INSTITUTE OF HUNGARIAN LINGUISTICS AND LITERARY SCIENCE IN NITRA/NYITRA

Since my survey was conducted among university students in Nitra/Nyitra, I will briefly describe the teaching of onomastics in the institute.<sup>3</sup> The Institute of Hungarian Linguistics and Literary Science at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra/Nyitra has played an important role in Hungarian-relevant research on onomastics in Slovakia in the past and still does today. The Institute has a long history of teaching onomastics.<sup>4</sup> Currently, students can take the Onomastics unit as part of the BA component of the teacher training program. Our students are also keen to engage in research on onomastics. They can take the course as an elective in any of the three years of their bachelor's studies. Undergraduate students in the Hungarian-Slovak Bilingual Administration and Hungarian Language and Culture (Translation and Interpreting) programs can take *Onomastics and Translation (Onomastika a preklad)* as an elective course in any of the three years. Students in the Master's degree programs in Teacher Education and Hungarian in Bilingual Office Communication can take the course *Researching Place Names in a Bilingual Context (Výskum toponým v bilingválnom prostredí)*. When compiling the topics of the onomastics units, we try to take into account the knowledge that our students have already acquired in other linguistics courses. At the end of the semester, students submit a seminar paper on onomastics based on their own research. Many students also write thesis papers on onomastics, supervised by János Bauko, Ágnes Héder, Károly Presinszky, Ferenc Vörös, István Kozmács, Ilona Telekiné Nagy, and László Angyal.<sup>5</sup> Students are also encouraged to submit

<sup>3</sup>János Bauko has also reviewed the teaching of onomastics at the Institute in his previous studies (Bauko, 2011, 2021b,c,d, 2022).

<sup>4</sup>One of the topics of the lessons on onomastics is the study of attitudes to names. "When discussing attitudes to names, we are interested in the attitudes of our students towards names, their way of relating to names, and their evaluative opinions about them" (Bauko, 2011, p. 39).

<sup>5</sup>In the academic year 2023/2024, János Bauko and László Angyal supervised a series of papers on onomastics.

papers on onomastic topics for the Students' Scholarly Competition (*Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia*, TDK).

As an institution outside Hungary, our institute has also joined the Hungarian National Toponym Registry Program (*Magyar Nemzeti Helynévtár Program*), which was launched in January 2022.<sup>6</sup> The students of the Hungarian Institute of Linguistics and Literary Science are carrying out place name collection work in individual Hungarian settlements in Slovakia. In addition to the above-mentioned university courses, their methodological training for collecting and professionally processing place names is also supported by database building camps organized by the University of Debrecen, Hungary. Thanks to the program, the number of theses dealing with place names in our institute is rising.

## RESEARCH INTO ATTITUDES TO NAMES IN THE LIGHT OF THE ONOMASTICS LITERATURE

Within the field of onomastics, there is so far only a small number of papers on name bearers' knowledge about their own family names and first names, and the studies available are mainly limited to the choice of names and the associations that names evoke (cf. [Slíz, 2015](#), pp. 99–101). According to [Kovalovszky](#), “every name is a close accessory of the bearer”, and if we know the bearer of the name, “we are very easily inclined to search for and find an organic connection between the name and the person” ([Kovalovszky, 1934](#), p. 7, 12). According to [Kiss \(1995, p. 135\)](#), the attitude towards proper names refers to the attitude of people or certain groups of people towards names, their way of relating to them, and their evaluative opinion of them.

Research on the onomastic awareness of language users has mostly focused on primary school children's (e.g. [Raátz, 1994](#)) and high school students' (e.g. [Gelegonyáné Katona, 2015](#)) knowledge of names. In her 2016 study, [Schirm](#) uses data from a questionnaire survey to discuss university students' and older lay respondents' knowledge of and attitudes towards their own names, the family names of the place they live in, and family names referring to occupations. In another study, she investigates the extent to which respondents know the meaning and origin of their own family names and first names, their attitudes towards name magic, their views on name fashion, and their attitudes towards their own names ([Schirm, 2014](#)). [Takács \(2018\)](#) investigated the stereotypes associated with names among prospective teachers and the impact of these stereotypes. She analyzed categorization and stereotyping from a social psychological perspective, using the frameworks of typification and prototype theory.

Studies on attitudes towards proper names<sup>7</sup> have also been published in the Hungarian onomastic literature in Slovakia. [Bauko](#) has studied the attitudes of Hungarian university students in Nitra/Nyitra towards personal names in several studies ([Bauko, 2004, 2009a,b, 2019](#)). The attitudes of Hungarian university students in Nitra/Nyitra towards personal names are also

<sup>6</sup>The program is part of the national programs of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the framework of the Scholarship for the Hungarian Language Program, whose primary aim is to collect, document, and publish the place names in use in the Hungarian language area today and in historical times, and the program also considers the Hungarian language area beyond Hungary's borders as a priority ([Hoffmann, 2022](#)).

<sup>7</sup>Attitudes to proper names refer to the attitudes of individuals or groups towards names, their ways of relating to them, and their evaluative opinions about them” ([Bauko, 2015](#), p. 111).

illustrated in his study of “the ten most beautiful Hungarian words” (Bauko, 2003a), where the lexis investigated included proper names, among them many personal names. In other studies, Bauko has investigated attitudes towards nicknames (Bauko, 2003b, 2005). Attitude studies towards nicknames analyze the attitudes of the name bearer and the name-using community towards the name. “Whether a nickname is emotionally indifferent or expressive is always decided by the community of the locality and the attitude of the bearer towards the name” (Ördög, 1969, p. 191). The author of the present paper conducted an attitude study in two types of schools: in the Hungarian classes of a four-year high school (Ivan Krasko Grammar School) and in a vocational high school (Private Technical High School), both in Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat. A total of 90 respondents participated in the survey, of whom 41 were grammar school students and 49 were technical high school students. The survey aimed to find out what students’ knowledge about naming was, how well informed they were about naming culture, and how they thought about name stylistic features (Angyal, 2023), with comparisons also made by gender and type of school.

## EXAMINING STUDENTS’ KNOWLEDGE OF ONOMASTICS AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS NAMES

### Questionnaire survey and hypotheses

The study was carried out at the Faculty of Central European Studies, Constantine the Philosopher University at Nitra/Nyitra, Slovakia, among students at the Institute of Hungarian Linguistics and Literary Science and the Institute for Teacher Training. A total of 109 students completed the questionnaire,<sup>8</sup> of whom 12 were male and 97 female. The gender distribution reflects the fact that mainly women choose to become teachers, as most of the respondents were teacher trainees.

In compiling the questionnaire, my aim was to find out about the students’ knowledge of onomastics, their awareness of name culture, their thoughts on naming stylistic features, and their relationship with their names. During the questionnaire survey, I asked my respondents 14 questions. Before tackling the questions, the respondents were given short instructions about the purpose of the survey and were assured verbally that the survey did not measure how well-informed they were, so there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. The 14 questions of the questionnaire are as follows (cf. Bauko, 2009a):

1. Do you think your family name has a meaning?
2. Do you think your first name has a meaning?
3. Do you know the origin of your family name? If so, describe it.
4. Do you know the origin of your first name? If so, describe it.
5. Do you know why this first name was chosen for you? If so, please describe it.
6. When is your name day? Do you celebrate it? When?
7. What do your family members, teachers, and friends call you? Which nickname do you prefer?

<sup>8</sup>The questionnaires were completed by students of the Hungarian-Slovak Bilingual Administration and Hungarian Language in Bilingual Office Communication study programs, in addition to the teacher trainees and the translator and interpreter trainees. Respondents included students who had not attended any of the onomastics courses.

8. How common do you think your family name is? How common do you think your first name is?
9. Please circle the statement that applies to you. (a) *My first name fits me*; (b) *My first name is fashionable*; (c) *My first name is special*; (d) *My family name and first name sound good together*.
10. What family name and/or first name would you choose for yourself instead of the one you have now? Give reasons for your choice.
11. Would you change your family name? (e.g. would you Hungarianize or Slovakize it, would you choose a completely new family name?)
12. Have you ever experienced any inconvenience because of your family name?
13. List the five female names and five male names that you think are the most beautiful.
14. Do you know any proverbs or sayings in which your name appears?

Based on previous experience and the literature, I assumed before doing the research that, unlike the primary and secondary school respondents in previous studies, university students were aware of the meaning and origin of their own family names and first names, knew the reasons for the choice of their first names and the date of their name day, and had a positive attitude towards their family names and first names. I based my assumptions on the fact that university students have the opportunity to learn about onomastics in the course of their studies in various onomastics courses, while primary and secondary school students only encounter similar information in grammar classes as part of Hungarian lessons, where these topics are discussed indirectly. Also, I assumed that being older and more educated, university students would be better informed about personal names.

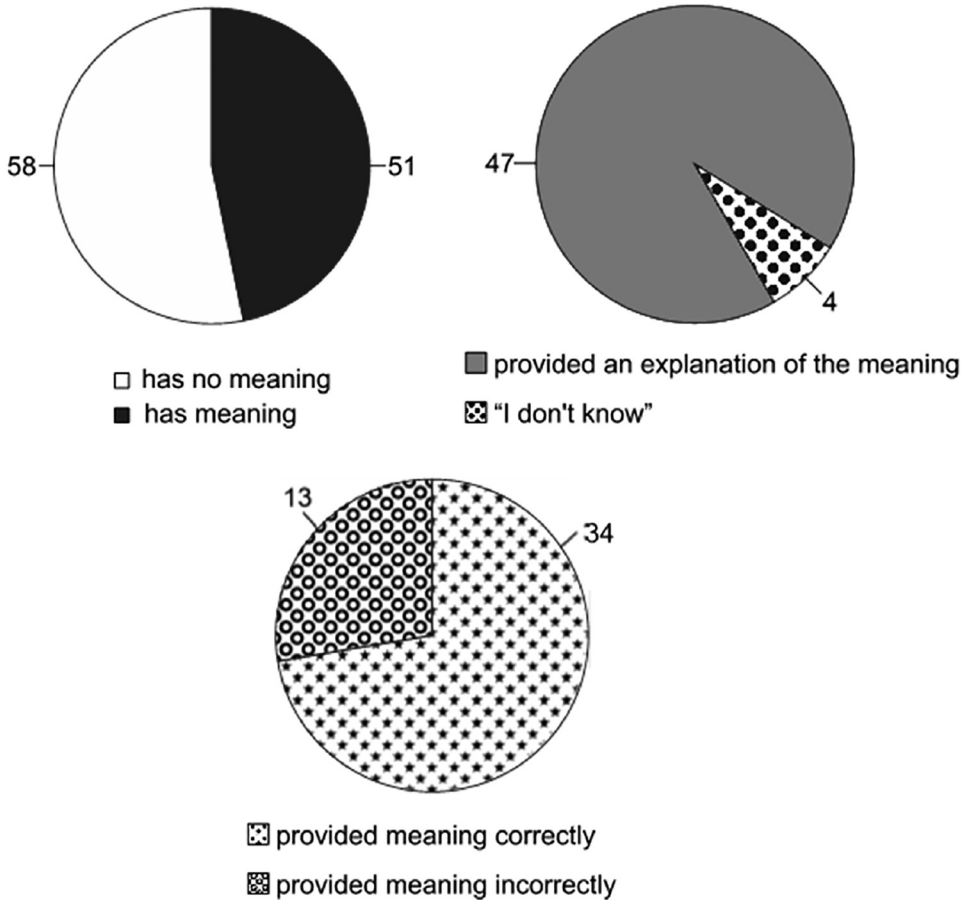
### Knowledge about the meaning and origin of family names

The first question in my questionnaire investigated knowledge about family names. Family names are inherited from father to child, i.e. they mark descent and signal the cohesion of families (Hajdú, 2010, p. 8). In this question, students were asked whether their family name had a meaning and, if so, what this meaning was. Of the students, 58 (53%) answered that their family name had no meaning, while 51 students (47%) said it did. Of the 51 respondents, 47 (92%) also attempted to explain the meaning of their name, of whom 34 (72%) gave the meaning of their family name correctly and 13 (28%) incorrectly. Only 4 respondents (8%) said that their name had a meaning but did not say what it was, or simply wrote “I don’t know”. Regarding the origin of their family name, 35 (32%) of the respondents knew the origin, 55 (50%) did not know it, and 19 (17%) did not answer. The responses showed that roughly half of the respondents did not know the meaning or origin of their family name, and even some of those who thought they did gave inaccurate answers and incorrect etymological explanations (Figs 1–3).

### Knowledge about the meaning and origin of first names

Almost everyone would like to know where their first name comes from, whether the name has foreign language equivalents, in which era it was fashionable, what traditions and customs are associated with it, and who were some famous bearers, etc. (Fercsik and Raátz, 2009).

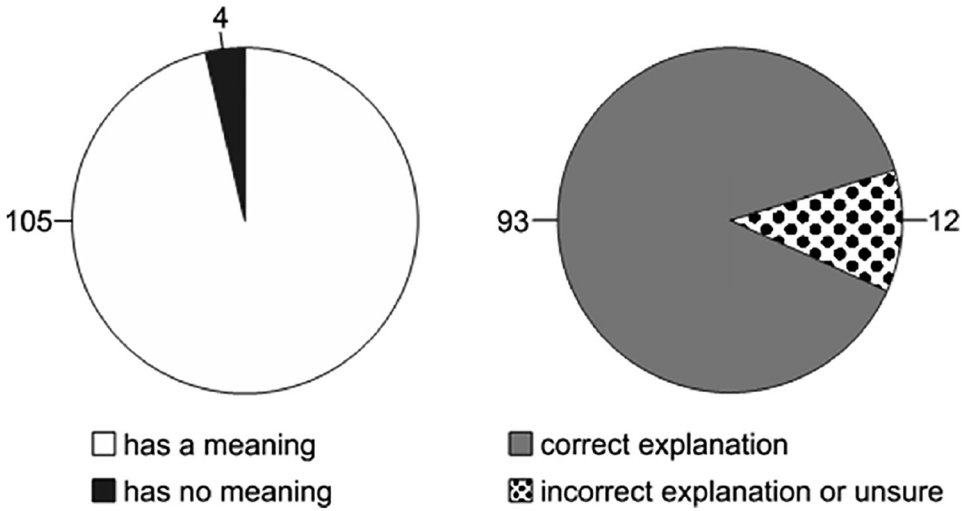
Among the respondents, 97 women share 46 first names and 12 men share 11 first names. Regarding first names, I first examined whether the students knew the meanings of theirs. Among the respondents, the name *Dávid* had the highest prevalence among the male names,



**Figs. 1-3.** Students' opinions about the meaning of their own family names

and among the female names, *Réka* did, but *Vivien*, *Veronika*, *Viktória*, *Krisztina*, *Orsolya*, *Eszter*, *Bianka* and *Rebeka* were also common. Double first names occurred only among women – perhaps as a sign of parents seeking more individual name combinations for their daughters than for their sons: *Réka Virág*, *Eszter Réka*, *Virág Mercedesz*, *Mária Melánia*, *Karolina Éva*, *Alexandra Antónia*, *Tamara Kitty*, *Amarilla Mercedes* and *Annabella Andrea*. The claim according to which name givers strive for uniqueness by choosing two (less often three) names was confirmed by [Kovács \(2009\)](#) in his study on the characteristics of Hungarians giving first names in Subcarpathia. At the same time, [Hajdú](#) pointed out that “the choice of several first names for a newborn is still a far from clear aspect of our onomastics” ([Hajdú, 2003](#), p. 583).

[Figure 4](#) shows that 4 (4%) of the 109 students thought that their first name had no meaning. The rest, 105 (96%) answered that it did, and all of them gave an explanation, but 12 (11%) incorrectly explained the meaning of their first name or thought it had an uncertain meaning. The remaining respondents (93) gave a correct explanation ([Fig. 5](#)). Based on the responses to the question regarding the origin of the first name, 84 students (77%) knew the origin of their



**Figs. 4–5.** Students' opinions about the meaning of their own first names

first name, 21 (19%) were not aware, and 4 respondents (4%) did not provide a response. Among the precise answers we find the following examples: *Dóra* “is derived from the Latin word *Theodora*, and is a name derived from a nickname for *Dorottya*”; *Anita* is “a name of Spanish origin, formed from the nicknames of *Anna* and *Johanna*.”

In contrast to their family names, the students had more information about their first names, were more familiar with their etymology than with that of their family names, and, I presume, most of this knowledge was gained from what they learned in their onomastics classes, while a smaller proportion of students may have obtained information from texts and websites popularizing scholarship. Incorrect answers were likely based on conflicting etymologies put forward by lay authors.

The results of the data on the meaning and origin of family names and first names confirm the results of the study on personal names carried out by Bauko in 2004: students knew more about the etymology of their first names than of family names (Bauko, 2004, p. 78).

### Understanding the motives for cross-fertilization

The survey also investigated whether students were aware of their parents' motives for naming. All parents have an interest in what first names they should choose for their children. Name giving is a simple (non-organized) name management activity: it involves the assignment of an existing or a newly created name to a person (Lanstyák, 2015, p. 43). Naming is mostly done by choosing a first name for the newborn from the existing name pool<sup>9</sup> (Bauko, 2021a, pp. 24–25).

<sup>9</sup>The planned Hungarian–Slovak first name dictionary by János Bauko aims to serve the purpose of organized name management. The dictionary will contain the male and female first names that can be officially registered in Hungary, their Slovak equivalents, as well as information on the origin and meaning of the name, nickname forms, dates of name days, and related names (Bauko, 2021, p. 28).

The first name choice of Hungarians in Slovakia differs from the naming characteristics of both Hungarians in Hungary and Slovaks in Slovakia (Bauko, 2021a, p. 27). Bilingual persons belonging to minorities in Slovakia can choose from a richer pool of names, of both minority and majority names, when choosing a first name. In some Hungarian municipal registry offices in Slovakia, János Ladó and Ágnes Bíró's *Hungarian book of names* [Magyar utónévkönyv] is also used (Bauko, 2015, p. 85). Furthermore, interethnic relations enrich the name pool from which Hungarians in Slovakia can choose, containing first names from different languages.

The question regarding the motivation for first names was answered by 101 (92%) of the respondents, while 8 (8%) did not provide a reply to the question. As can be seen in Fig. 6, the answers can be divided into five categories. Of those who did answer the question, 45 students (44%) gave liking the name as the sole motivation for choosing a first name: most of them had names that their parents or a family member liked. But there were other motives for their choices too: "Because there was no girl with that name in the village, and that's why my parents liked it" (*Bianka*); "Because friends of my parents had a daughter called *Orsolya* and my parents liked it too" (*Orsolya*). In a few cases (10 respondents), the motive of heredity appeared (10%). In this respect, some respondents gave a precise answer: "My mother's name is the same and I was named after her." (*Henrietta*); "My great-grandmother's name was Anna." (*Annabella*); "I was named after my maternal grandmother's mother." (*Karolina*); "I inherited my godmother's name." (*Renáta*), etc. An exploration of the motivations for naming has revealed that in some cases the name seemed to be the exclusive choice of a particular person: "My godmother chose this name for me because she liked it." (*Dóra*). In all, 17 students (17%) did not know the reason for their first names; 29% (29 students) gave other answers, for example, "Because my

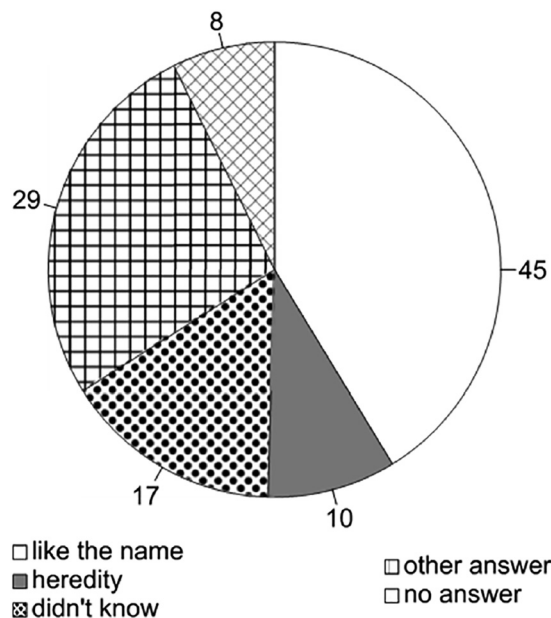


Fig. 6. Motivations for the assignment of students' first names

mom really liked the film *Gone with the Wind* and the main character in the film was Scarlett.” (*Scarlett*); “I got it from the character in the fairy tale *The Lion King*.” (*Chiara*); “Because my parents wanted to give me a Hungarian name.” (*Zsolt*); “Because they thought it was special, not a very common name.” (*Brigitta*); “My mom wanted a name with the nickname *Ani*.” (*Anita*).

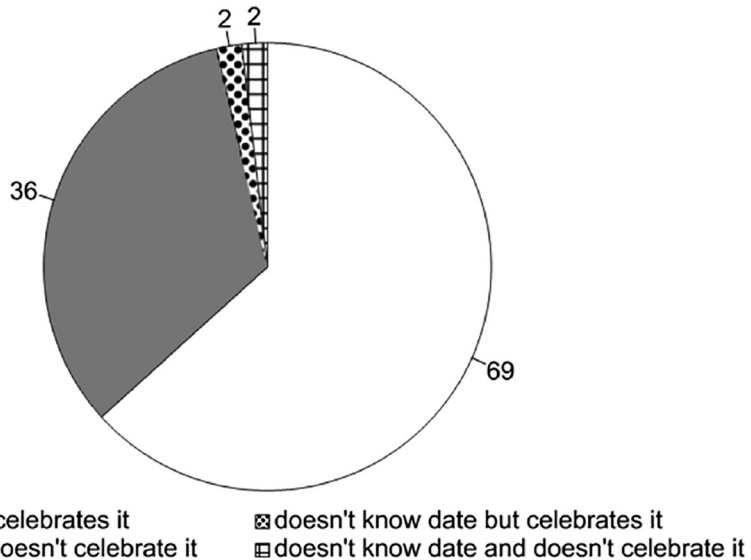
Mothers play a dominant role in first name choice, as the data on first name choice from Bauko’s 2004 survey (Bauko, 2004, p. 75) and the present results show. The responses also demonstrate that the majority of students indicated name preference and heredity as reasons for the name giving.

**Knowing when their name day is and celebrating it**

In the questionnaire, I also asked the students if they knew the date of their name day in the year, if they celebrated it and, if so, when. Figure 7 shows that the majority of respondents, 63% (69 students), know when their name day is and celebrate it, while 36 students (33%) know when their name day is but do not celebrate it. There were some respondents (2 students; 2%) who, despite not knowing when their name day was, still celebrated it, and 2 (2%) who did not know or celebrate their name day at all.

**Students’ nicknames**

Addressing and using a nickname is a linguistic means of establishing a relationship, which can express the relationship between the two parties, the addressor and the addressee. “The name forms produced by changing the form of the full first name or by modifying some parts of it (omitting or adding to them with the help of suffixes) are called nicknames” (Bauko, 2015, p. 44). These types of names are used among family, relatives, and friends, and are more



**Fig. 7.** Students’ knowledge about when their own name day is

personal, intimate, and emotionally charged forms of address. Nowadays, nicknames are not only used in addressing but are also increasingly common in the registration of nicknames as official (Bíró, 1993).

In their answers, students gave examples of nicknames used by three communities (family, friends, and teachers). The data show that the nicknames most often used are those given by family members and friends, who use such names for identification. The 57 first names had 315 nicknames associated with them. Only 2 students answered that they had no nickname at all. According to the respondents, mostly the registered form of their first names or the more traditional nickname forms (e.g. *Peti*, *Tomi*, *Dani*, or *Kati*, from *Péter*, *Tamás*, *Dániel*, and *Katalin*, respectively, etc.) are used. Full names are only used by teachers.<sup>10</sup> Often, teachers used nicknames formed by adding a diminutive to the family name, e.g. Szabóka (from Szabó + *-ka* “diminutive suffix”).

Only 2 respondents said that they did not like being called by their nicknames at all. One of them argued their answer as follows: “I don’t really like to be called by a nickname because it’s unserious.”

As far as the frequency of nicknames associated with first names is concerned, i.e. which type of nickname is associated with the most nicknames in the corpus under study, we can establish the following order (only those first names are given that had the most nicknames associated with them, among the responses):

*Karolina* (16):<sup>11</sup> *Karoli*, *Caroline*, *Lina*, *Lincus*, *Karolinka*, *Lili*, *Karcsi*, *Karo*, *Lini*, *Karcsika*, *Nana*, *Kajó*, *Kari*, *Karolin*, *Lincsi*, and *Kalyi*,

*Veronika* (15): *Veroni*, *Verona*, *Vero*, *Vera*, *Nika*, *Veroncsi*, *Toncsi*, *Verus*, *Vercsi*, *Verocska*, *Veri*, *Rocsus*, *Veve*, *Veronka*, and *Veró*.

*Rebeka* (12): *Rebuska*, *Rebike*, *Rebcsa*, *Rebcsó*, *Rebu*, *Rebe*, *Repcsi*, *Beki*, *Rebi*, *Beka*, *Rebella*, and *Rechy*.

*Krisztina* (11): *Kriszti*, *Kika*, *Tina*, *Kiki*, *Kuki*, *Krisztinka*, *Kikus*, *Krisztusz*, *Kikuska*, *Kriszta*, and *Tinka*.

*Bianka* (9): *Bibi*, *Bibike*, *Bius*, *Biuska*, *Bibus*, *Bibó*, *Bimbike*, *Bia*, and *Biu*.

*Viktória* (9): *Viki*, *Vicus*, *Vica*, *Kiki*, *Vikcsu*, *Vikesz*, *Vikkancs*, *Vikóca*, and *Vikike*.

*Friderika* (8): *Fridus*, *Fridi*, *Frida*, *Frici*, *Fifi*, *Fidi*, *Federi*, and *Friday*.

*Natália* (7): *Nati*, *Natika*, *Natali*, *Natko*, *Natálka*, *Natkó*, and *Natasa*.

*Réka* (6): *Rékus*, *Buci*, *Rékuci*, *Rék*, *Réku*, and *Rékuc*.

*Annabella* (6): *Bella*, *Bellácska*, *Annácska*, *Bellus*, *Belluska*, and *Bellike*.

*Alexandra* (6): *Szandi*, *Szandika*, *Szaszi*, *Sanyi*, *Alexa*, and *Lexi*.<sup>12</sup>

## Name frequency

Nowadays, name givers are increasingly striving to give their children rare names. The questionnaire also asked the students to respond to the question on the frequency of their own family names and first names. Of the respondents, 40 (37%) said that their family name was common (e.g. *Varga*, *Tóth*, *Sweet*, *Németh*, etc.), 55 (50%) said that it was rare (e.g. *Sindler*, *Juhar*, *Lauko*,

<sup>10</sup>71 respondents said they are addressed with nicknames by their teachers.

<sup>11</sup>The numbers in brackets refer to the nickname variants.

<sup>12</sup>In a study conducted by János Bauko in 2002, *Erika*, *Katalin*, *Gabriella* and *Szilvia* were the names with the most nicknames associated with them (cf. Bauko, 2004, pp. 80–82).

*Kálnay, Kanyó*, etc.), and 13 respondents (12%) gave other answers (e.g. “I only know one other person with this name who is not a relative.” (*Šoltés*); “I have not encountered it so far, only when it came to priests.” (*Káplán*, which means “chaplain” as a common noun); “In the region where I live, (*Zoboralja*), it is common.” (*Gyepes*); “I think it’s very common in my area.” (*Bandura*), etc.); and one respondent did not answer the question (Fig. 8).

Figure 9 shows that 61 (56%) respondents said that their first name was common (e.g. *Regina, Anita, Kitti, Dávid*, etc.), and 34 (31%) said it was very rare (e.g. *Veronika, Nikolett, Klaudia, Scarlett*, etc.). A total of 12 students (11%) gave other answers (e.g. “Medium, not the most common, but very common among people my age.” (*Máté*); “Very common, especially in Hungary I think.” (*Bianka*); “I haven’t come across it very often in this form.” (*Cintia*), etc.), one did not answer the question, and one did not know. The answers show that respondents consider their family names mostly rare, while their own first name was considered frequent by slightly more than half of the respondents. This may be due to the fact that respondents have more knowledge about their first names than their family names.

### Students’ attitudes towards family names and first names

Attitudes towards proper names are an integral part of language attitudes. One of the questions in the questionnaire sought to find out how students felt about their own names.<sup>13</sup> One of the

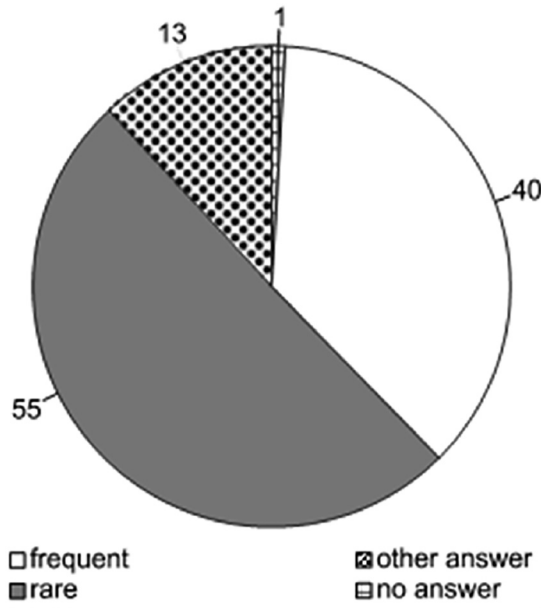
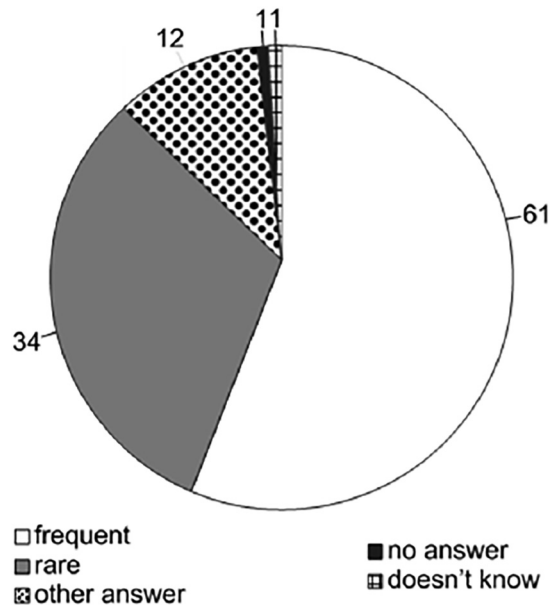


Fig. 8. Students’ knowledge regarding the frequency of their own family names

<sup>13</sup>For this question, I verbally instructed the students that if they had a negative attitude towards their personal name, they should not check any of the answer options.



**Fig. 9.** Students' knowledge about the frequency of their own first names

things they were asked to do was to circle one of the four statements that characterized their name. Students could choose more than one answer. I was looking for answers on whether their first name was fashionable, whether they considered their name fitting them, whether their name was special, and whether their family name and first name sounded good together. Of the students, 21 (19%) responded that their first name fitted them, 11 (10%) considered their last name to be special, and 23 (21%) checked the box that their family name and first name sounded good together. However, 53 (49%) respondents checked more than one response option: one (2%) said that their first name was special and sounded good with their family name, 7 (13%) said it fitted them, was fashionable, and sounded good with their family name, 3 (6%) said their first name was fitting and special, and 20 (38%) said it was fitting and sounded good with their family name. A total of 7 (13%) respondents indicated that their first name was fitting, special, and sounded good with their family name, 2 (4%) said that it was fitting and fashionable, and one person said that it was fitting, fashionable, and special. Twelve respondents (23%) checked all four options. There was only one respondent who did not check any of them, instead answering "I don't feel like any of these is true as I don't like my name."

The responses indicate that the majority of students have positive attitudes towards their personal names. Most numerous were those who thought their family name and first name sounded good together. They were followed by those who thought their first names were fashionable. Presumably, the relationship between the name-giver and the name-bearer may also influence attitudes towards the personal name, as evidenced by the opinion of the respondent who alone had a negative attitude towards their name. The personality of the name bearer can also influence attitudes towards their name. The answers showed that some people

sometimes like their name, other times dislike it or are indifferent to it: “I didn’t like it for a long time, but now I accept it”. The meaning of the name and the sound of the name can also create positive associations in people about their name.

The current results confirm the findings of studies conducted by Bauko in 2002 and 2008: the name bearers in those studies considered their inherited family names and first names to be natural, and had positive attitudes towards their names (Bauko, 2004, 2009a,b) (Fig. 10).

In the next question, I asked students what family name and/or first name they would choose instead of their current one. Changing one’s name is also a name management activity: it is the replacement of the name with another name or with a modified form of the former name (cf. Vörös, 2004, pp. 22–26). Of the respondents, 66 (60%) would not change their family name, 37 (34%) would, 5 students (6%) did not answer the question, and one did not know whether they would or not. Those who would change their name gave the following answers to justify their decision: “Varga - I think my mother’s maiden name would fit much better and it is better to write than all the diacritics.” (Káplán); “Something more special, I find it boring.” (Nagy); “If I had to, I would use my mother’s maiden name.” (Tóth); “Yes, I would very much like to drop the -ová.”<sup>14</sup> (Vargová). Of the respondents, 51 (47%) would not change their first name (one respondent reported that her perception of her name had changed as she got older, explaining: “I didn’t like it for a long time, but I’ve accepted it and I like it.” – Natália),

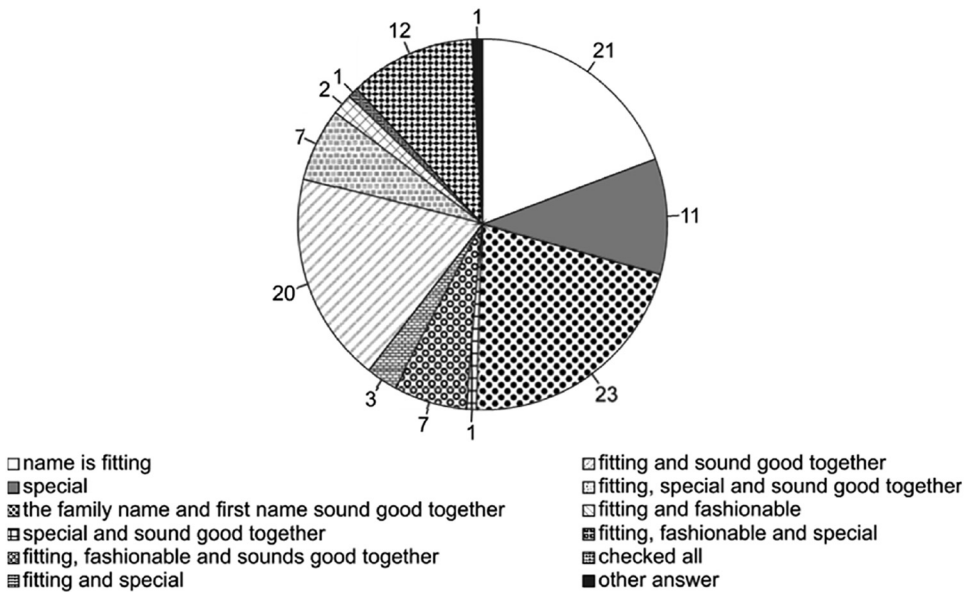


Fig. 10. Students’ attitudes towards their first names

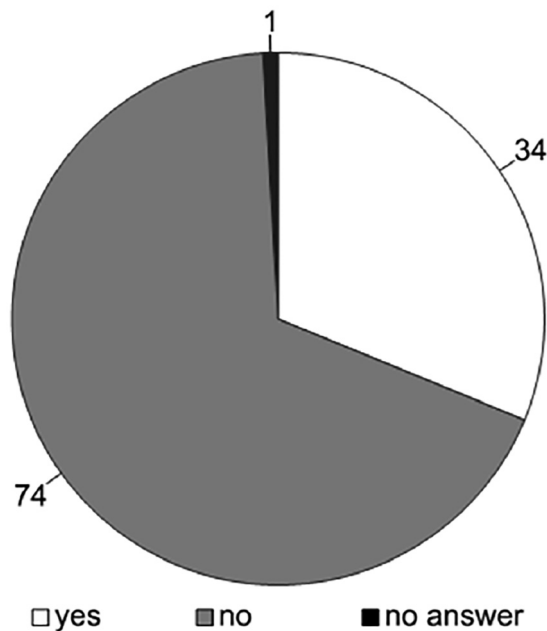
<sup>14</sup>In Slovakia, the suffix -ová refers to the female bearer of the family name. Law #154 on civil registers, adopted in 1994, allows women of non-Slovak nationality to register their family name without the -ová suffix (cf. Bauko, 2004, pp. 78–79).

35 (32%) said that they would, e.g.: “I would change the name *Martina* to *Tina* because people call me *Tina* a lot.” (*Martina*); “*Sára* – because very few young people have this name anymore and it is special to me.” (*Regina*). A total of 23 students (21%) did not answer the question.

The responses showed that the majority of the name bearers would not change their family name or first name and preferred to accept and take for granted the name they had been given. The results of the current study only partially show the same as the responses of Bauko’s survey in 2008 did: in his study, fewer students said they would change their family name (17%), while more name bearers (86%) had a positive attitude towards their first name and would not change it (Bauko 2009a,b).

### Evaluation of the answers to the other questions of the questionnaire

The next question asked whether the respondents had ever experienced any inconvenience because of their family name. Of the students, 34 (31%) answered that they did, with some of them providing examples such as “People have often joked about the fact that my family name is *Kapu*” (*kapu* means “gate” in Hungarian); “I have been embarrassed by the mispronunciations of my family name”; “When I was younger, my classmates associated *Korcsok* with *korcs* [“mutt”]”; “I was deliberately teased about my family name when I was a child.” In addition to affirmative responses, negative opinions were also present in the sample: 74 of the respondents (68%) said they had not been embarrassed by their family name, and one did not answer the question (Fig. 11).



**Fig. 11.** Students’ opinions about whether they experienced anything unpleasant because of their family names

The students also had to choose the five most beautiful women's and men's names independently (no options were presented to them). The female names regarded as the most beautiful were, in decreasing order, *Anna* (22 votes), *Hanna* (20), *Emma* (15), *Zoé* (11), *Jázmin* (9), and *Camilla* (8) (a total of 230 different names were provided in the answers). The male names with the most votes were *Máté* (24), *Dániel* (23), *Ádám* (22), *Levente* (19), *Dominik* (16), and *Dávid* (15) (162 different names were given in total). The stylistic associations of a personal name can be influenced by its meaning and sound (phonetic form), so it is likely that these factors were also at play in students' choices of the most pleasant-sounding and beautiful names. The present results are partly in line with the findings of Bauko's survey of university students in Nitra/Nyitra 20 years ago, where *Dávid* and *Dániel* were among the most beautiful names for men, and *Anna* was one of the most beautiful names for women among university students in Nitra/Nyitra (Bauko, 2004, p. 76).

Anthroponyms also occur in phrases, so I was also curious to find out what kind of phraseological units containing personal names the students knew. So, in the last question, I asked whether the students knew any proverbs or sayings in which their names were mentioned. In the responses, only 20 students (18%) answered that they knew such a saying, e.g. the tongue twister *Mit sütsz kis szűcs, tán sós húst sütsz kis szűcs?* "What are you roasting, little furrier, are you roasting salty meat, little furrier?" (containing the family name *Szűcs*, cf. *szűcs* "furrier"), or the saying *Úgy készül, mint a Luca széke* "It's made like Luca's chair." (*Luca*).

### Name management and using knowledge of onomastics in education

Unfortunately, the teaching of onomastics in Hungarian schools in Slovakia is only indirectly present. In primary and secondary school textbooks, names are mentioned in the context of proper nouns, when discussing parts of speech, as well as in connection with spelling. There is no mention at all of name bearing, name giving, naming fashions, or the frequency of names. However, the knowledge of onomastics examined in the survey can be incorporated into the curricula of other subjects (e.g. geography, history, biology, etc.) in addition to Hungarian language lessons, so that students' knowledge of onomastics can be expanded through thoughtful name management and the popularization of onomastic information. In addition to the knowledge about personal names (family names, first names, nicknames, etc.), it would also be important to include in teaching the other onomastic phenomena examined in the survey (name giving, name choice, name change, name frequency, attitudes to names, and the stylistics of names, etc.). Similarly to the methodological materials and textbooks in Hungary (cf. Fercsik and Raátz, 1995, 1996; Fercsik, 2014), a textbook on certain areas of onomastics would be important and useful, which could be used by students in primary and secondary schools, either in the classroom or in other extra-curricular activities. Onomastic knowledge could be discussed as part of pedagogical projects, or even in extracurricular school workshops (cf. Csobády, 2022). By discussing knowledge about proper names in class and developing a culture of naming, we can familiarize students with interdisciplinary connections, which can make the related school material interesting for them. This can also help them to deepen their knowledge about their mother tongue.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the responses to the naming survey among university students in Nitra/Nyitra has revealed that the students found the topic exciting and that this influenced their willingness to respond: all respondents gave valuable answers to the majority of the questions. The main conclusions to be drawn from the survey are that, contrary to expectations, most of the students surveyed have uncertain and incomplete knowledge about their family names and fairly precise knowledge about their first names. Indeed, the responses have shown that students are more likely to know the meaning and origin of their first names than that of their family names. The majority of the respondents knew the meaning and origin of their first names, unlike the primary school (cf. Raátz, 1994) and secondary school (cf. Gelegonyáné Katona, 2015) respondents in previous studies, but – contrary to my expectations – had less knowledge about their family names, which was also similar to the results of Bauko's 2002 survey.

The dominant role of mothers in parents' choice of first names of their children was emphasized: the motivation for first names was primarily the liking of the name and heredity. Parents prefer to choose a name for both boys and girls that is rare in the community, which means that tradition and conservatism are increasingly being pushed into the background in name giving, a finding that confirms the results of previous studies (cf. Gelegonyáné Katona, 2015; Angyal, 2023; Raátz, 1994). First name choice is also simple (non-organized) name management. The majority of respondents knew when their name day was and celebrated it. Most respondents said they were given a nickname by family members and friends, and that teachers most often addressed them by their full names. Most nicknames were associated with the first names *Karolina*, *Veronika*, *Rebeka* and *Krisztina*. Most students had more knowledge about their first names, and they considered them more frequent than their family names. The attitude survey showed that the majority of students liked their own names, so attitudes towards their names were positive, and they thought it natural to have the name they had been given. Similarly, the majority of respondents never experienced any discomfort due to their family names. The names *Anna* and *Máté* were among the "best sounding" names mentioned by respondents.

A qualitative analysis of a representative sample of lay language users at a later stage would allow more general conclusions to be drawn from studies like the present one. It would be worthwhile to continue the research and to extend the sample further, for example, by examining phenomena that point to the psychological background of names, i.e. by looking at language users' knowledge about the magic of names and the power of names. Since proper names can have different emotional effects, it would also be worth looking at the stylistics of anthroponyms. Furthermore, it would also be worth comparing the results of the survey among Hungarian university students in Slovakia with the results of the survey among Hungarian secondary school students in Slovakia (cf. Angyal, 2023).

Since the use of proper names is part of our everyday life and part of our identity, it would be worthwhile to include more information about names not only in university education but also in primary and secondary education: in lessons, specialized courses, and pedagogical projects (Csobády, 2022). Activities popularizing onomastic information would no doubt contribute to more onomastic knowledge among students.

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