

TRENDS IN THE CHOICE OF FIRST NAMES IN HUNGARY SINCE THE SECOND
HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

I. IntroductionThe study intends to analyse the changes in the Hungarian first name-giving practice and their background causes in the second half of the last century. Political, legal and social influences as well as individual initiatives will be listed as assumed factors in order to elucidate their role in the radical transformation of the Hungarian first name data. The long-term aim is to identify trends specific to the development of Hungarian data of first names based on name statistics, research results and databases representing the period.

II. From 1945 until the change of the regime (1989)The end of Second World War in 1945 ushered in political, socio-cultural changes in the history of the Hungarian nation. After the German troops had been expelled from Hungary, the country entered the Soviet sphere of influence. The former feudal-like system was brought to an end, and a socialist dictatorship was established based on authoritarian centralism.

1. Slow changesChanges were generated in the choices of first names by a slow transformation of social circumstances. For several years after 1945 there were no restrictions introduced regulating first name giving. The Name Enactment of XXXIII. year 1894 was still in force, according to which parents were allowed to get registered any number of first names for their infant in the register. (Therefore, often three-four – in extreme cases fifteen - first names were registered for the same child.) The only restriction was that the first names must be spelt according to the Hungarian rules and members of other nationalities were allowed to register the first names in their mother tongue as well in brackets.

In the early post war period parents basically followed the customs valid before World War II. in choosing first names. At the same time traces of a slow change could be detected. i.e. first names with archaic and gentleman like ambiance disappeared (*Lipót, Kázmér, Rachel, Jozefa*). Several new first names also appeared; for instance, the Russian *Tamara*, the German *Rita, Hedvig, Helga* and the Hungarian *Tünde, Kinga, Gyöngyvér*. The assortment of first names increased in certain settlements. This quantitative change appeared first for female first names and the same phenomenon appeared later for males.

At the beginning of 50's parents chose for their new born 150 kinds of female and 116 kinds of male first names on average per year. Although the assortment of names had grown, the wide spread 'traditional' first names ruled the top of frequency lists. The latter were so

common that the first ten forenames meant 60 % in case of boys and 55 % in case of girls out of the total choices of first names made by their parents for their new born.

The comparison of the frequency data gained from the years 1945, 1949 and 1959 convincingly proves that the fashion of giving new first names stagnated. We can hardly find any difference between the most frequent first names for more than ten years.

Female first names		Male first names	
Budapest 1945-1949	Budapest 1959	Budapest 1945-1949	Budapest 1959
Mária	Éva	László	László
Erzsébet	Zsuzsanna	István	István
Margit	Mária	József	József
Ilona	Katalin	János	János
Anna	Ágnes	Ferenc	Ferenc
Júlia	Judit	György	Sándor
Gizella	Erzsébet	Péter	Gábor
Teréz	Ildikó	Sándor	Zoltán
Róza	Ilona	Gábor	György
Irén	Edit	András	Tibor

Table 1. *The most frequently chosen first names in Budapest (1945-49, 1959)*

In 1959, however, two new first names for each of the sexes can be discovered: *Ildikó and Edit* for the females; *Zoltán and Tibor* for the males. This indicates the start of a slow process of change maturing only in the future (Table 1.). During these years the preferences of first names in towns and villages were different. *Beáta, Dóra, Hajnalka, Nóra, Viktória; Ákos, Alfréd, Balázs, Csaba* were preferred in towns while *Antal, Bálint, Julianna, Rozália* in the villages.

The more innovative given names started to appear first in towns. Villages with their more closed world followed this fashion only a few years later (i.e. *Csilla, Rita, Tímea, Tünde*). Male first names tended to hold on to tradition; new, fashionable names were hardly to be found among them. More fashionable, new first names appeared among the female names and their frequency rate was higher as well.

It is interesting that politics also had an influence on the choice of first names. Since the middle of 50's the name *Mátyás* became less and less popular which lasted until the first half of the 80's. The reason for this was that the unpopular Hungarian communist prime minister of Hungary was also called *Mátyás* (Rákosi Mátyás).

2. First RegulationsThe first name-giving process was firstly regulated at the beginning of the 50's (Statutory Rule 19. in 1952). It already restricted the number of first names to two which could be officially given to the new born. Further regulations were included in the Statutory Rule 33 of 1963 which suggested that first names with a foreign sound and spelling should be avoided in the register but it did not restrict the list of first names officially available. During this period registrars made arbitrary decisions relating to the registration of certain first names. Their work was not supported by any central register of first names. They could only use diaries and a roll of names published in 1948 (BABÓ 1948). The *Register* of twelve pages contained only approximately one thousand first names which were allowed to be officially registered and a few thousand prohibited ones. The latter were followed by their registerable name form. Apart from this no other information was given about these first names. There were no gender indications either. Therefore, several girls officially acquired male first names (i.e. *Celestin, Marcell*). The roll of names right in the moment of its birth included many first names which sounded unfamiliar to the Hungarian ear and the forename system; e.g. *Abercius, Acindimus, Adolár, Bozsetyecha, Csesztmir, Dobrodaj, Haralmapius, Nyagoe, Pafnuc, Zsivána*. At the same time several already fashionable first names of that age were missing from this forename registry: *Andrea, Anikó, Csaba, Csilla, Erika, Ildikó, Tünde* etc.

3. The birth of the Hungarian Book of Given NamesIn the 60's parents chose mainly traditional forenames for their children. Several boys inherited their father's first name. This traditional behaviour is demonstrated by the frequency list of first names published in 1967. The first names of both sexes are 80 % identical with the ones appearing in the frequency list of the year 1959. However, the presence of the most popular and fashionable given names of the 70's and 80's (*Andrea, Zsolt*) does indicate the stem of change.

Female first names	Male first names
Éva	László
Mária	Zoltán
Ildikó	István
Katalin	József

Erika	János
Erzsébet	Attila
Zsuzsanna	Sándor
Andrea	Tibor
Judit	Ferenc
Ágnes	Zsolt

Table 2. *The most frequently chosen first names in 1967*

Registrars still had to face the difficulties of registering and dealing with first names. The law repertory published in 1965, which in theory gave further guidance in choosing given names, in practice it did not bolster the decisions made by the authorities (BACSÓ-SZILÁGYI 1965). This repertory states that new born babies can acquire given names only in harmony with their gender. Furthermore, given names with a Hungarian equivalent or the ones which are double (e.g. *Annamária*) was prohibited from official registration. Meticulous office clerks, however, felt the insufficiency of this laconic guidance and sent the parents to the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in order to gain permission for registering the desired first name. Therefore, more than a dozen applications were submitted every month. This procedural complication urged the creation of a name register which would include all the first names suitable for official registration. Finally the acceptable list was created by professionals who synthesised the wishes of the public mobilised by public summons in television. The *Hungarian Book of Given Names* was edited by JÁNOS LADÓ in 1971. It included 1827 given names divided according to genders (896 female and 932 male names). This register contains not only the name form(ant) but also its common and etymological meaning, name day(s), nick name form(s) and kin names. The nature of these first names wears the imprint of the social needs of that time. Thus it included nicknames with an individually registerable form (*Aliz, Eliz, Zsóka* <*Erzsébet, Dóra*<*Dorotya*), revived old Hungarian names (*Ajtony, Apor, Kadosa, Bíborka, Dalma, Szemőke*), the newly arisen name forms (*Harmatka, Napsugár, Tavaszka*), foreign first names (*Barbara, Dorisz, Félix, Viktor*) and some double given names as well (*Annabella, Annamária*). Although Ladó's book did unburden and unify the first name giving process, it was not considered an official register until 1982 (when the Statutory Rule 17. declared that those first names are allowed to be officially registered exclusively which are printed in the *Hungarian Book of Given Names*). Yet, since the publication of this book the registrars registered only the given names present in it. It turned out that the 1827 first names in this

book were superabundant because the statistics of 1967 reveal that only one quarter of the names (462) were actually chosen by the parents. Furthermore, female names were more frequently used (274=29,32%) out of a total of 895, compared to the male first names where 188 names were used from the 932 available names.

4. The age of applications

In spite of the published book of given names, when a new officially not documented name was wanted, parents continued to apply for a specialist report at the Institute for Linguistics. Thus, the number of applications did not decrease, but increased each year. The average of applications per year was 120-130 in the 70's and 80's.

Why were parents not able to find suitable first names for their children in the book of given names? Explanations and reasons must be searched in social changes, in the development of the media, the mass communication and in the parent's desire to give their children a unique first name. In the applications of the 70's and 80's we can find first names forms which are currently common and sound almost traditional. The first names in those applications can be put into the following type clusters:

- a) Names from mythology and the Bible excluded from the Hungarian Book of Given Names (*Ruth, Nathanel; Euridike, Izisz, Ámor*).
- b) Hungarian historic names (*Kadocsa, Magor, Ené*).
- c) Names from world and Hungarian literature (*Robinzon, Zéta, Hadúr, Zuboly*).
- d) Actors' first names in television series and films (*Helmut, Szabaszián*). The latter was a prevalent name in applications as an impact of the popular series Bell and Sebastian.
- e) Some nick name forms (*Betti, Bóra, Emmi, Magdó, Netti, Örzse, Zsanka*).
- f) Many forgotten old Hungarian name forms were revived by parents (*Balzsam, Borostyán, Enese, Liliom, Neste, Gyoma, Surd, Vadony; Áldás, Erős* with the appellative meaning; *Szatmár, Zala* occurring also as geographical common names as well and *Borsa, Novák* occurring as family names as well.)
- g) First names with foreign origin which have several variants in European languages (*Dária, Alexander, Ronni*). First names characteristic to the Slav languages were also prevalent (*Danica, Danilla, Dusánka*). The number of first names with Finnish origin was high (*Anelli, Hilka, Virpi, Olavi, Pekka*).

It is interesting that the names typical in Western Europe were less frequent; there were mainly with a French origin (*Nanett, Nikolett, Ninett, Röné, Zseraldin, Zsinett, Zsüliett*). These foreign names were allowed to be registered only with Hungarian spelling. For

instance, *Jennifer*, the top star name of future applications appeared already at the end of the 70's but it was registered exclusively according to Hungarian spelling regulations as *Dzsenifer*.

At this time authorisations and specialist reports were given with great severity. This is proved by the fact that only 42 % of the applied first names were authorised for registration.

III. From the regime change to date

On 23rd October 1989 is considered a turning point in the history of Hungary. The radical change manifested in proclaiming the Hungarian Republic as a symbol and essence of the regime change: the country regained its sovereignty, the centralised economy was changed to the market focused economy and the state party was replaced by democracy based on a multi-party political system.

1. The quantitative growth of first names

At the end of the 80's early signs of the regime change could be detected in the radical changes of the first name data as well. Parents had a growing need to give their children a predominant first name which had status not only in Hungary but in Europe and all over the world. The number of first names with a foreign origin gradually increased which were unfamiliar in the Hungarian first name system. For instance, *Anita, Dorina, Inez, Dzsenifer, Klaudia, Nikolett, Szandra, Márió, Szebaszián, Patrik, Dominik, Alexander* etc. Although these were attention seeking names, they remained isolated, therefore they cannot be considered as fashionable names of that time. During these years there were still more traditional first names on the top of frequency lists which fitted into the Hungarian name and spelling system (see the statistics from the years 1983-87 in the Table).

Female first names	Male first names
Katalin	Gábor
Anita	Tamás
Andrea	Péter
Tímea	Zoltán
Zsuzsanna	László
Éva	István
Ágnes	Attila
Krisztina	Zsolt
Judit	János
Mónika	József

Table 3. *The most frequent first names of years 1983-87*

However, there is a significant difference compared to the beginning of the 50's: the ten most frequent names at both sexes were not given to half of the new born than as before because the assortment of selected first names by the parents gradually increased.

2. The new invasion of applications

The political, social changes mentioned above and the sense of freedom had an impact on the choice of first names as well. The existing book of first names proved not to fulfil the needs of the public. The old regulations became dated and more and more applications arrived at the Research Institute for Linguistics. The 500-600 applications per year contained very heterogeneous kinds of first names. It turned out that professionals of the Research Institute for Linguistics were more permissive and approved 70 % of the names in applications for registration. The nature of first names in applications changed:

2.1. In the cluster of female names:

a) First names with **a foreign origin** were prioritised; most of them are English and American (*Dzsenifer, Dzsesszika, Bonita, Bonni, Kimberli*). Still the prevalence was high of French (*Alett, Arlett, Babett, Deziré, Döniz, Sarlott, Zsaklin, Zsuliett, Zsüliett*), Italian (*Julietta, Lauretta, Leonetta, Loretta, Tinetta, Tittina*), German (*Annaróza, Brenda, Brunella, Gréte, Hédi, Katarina etc.*) and names with other origin (*Bítia, Cipora, Atina, Dafné, Dára, Nyina, Jana, Fatma, Davina etc.*).

b) Hungarian first names were chosen - in smaller quantity though - which can be classified in several etimological groups. i.e. Forgotten old Hungarian names (*Bíbor, Enéh, Liliom, Gyöngy*), name formations with an appellative origin which are mainly plant names (*Áfonya, Berkenye, Bodza, Boglár, Borbolya, Eper, Frézia, Gyopár, Kála, Magnólia, Málna, Mandula, Szamóca, Sziringa, Zsálya*), natural phenomena (*Bóra, Riana < rianás*), minerals (*Gyémánt, Platina*) and other names with common origin (*Áprilka, Bóbita, Gyöngyös, Rege, Tavasz, Zengő*).

c) The nick name form of common Hungarian first names which were popular (*Ági, Andi, Anni, Bori, Borka, Cili, Dorka, Gizi, Gréti, Gyöngyike, Hanni, Iluska, Juli, Katica, Klári, Magdi, Manyi, Marika, Mici, Mimi, Panka, Panni, Piri, Zsófi, Zsuzsi*). The nick name or abbreviated forms of first names with foreign origin had similar prevalence in the applications (*Ata, Babett, Boni, Darla, Effi, Evila, Gréte, Kim, , Lara, Letti, Linett, Lotti, Mandi, Meggi, Minett, Minka, Molli, Netti, Nyina, Peggi, Tiana, Tifani, Zorka, Zsanka etc*).

d) It became a preferred name form to create a double first name – common in the German practice – for instance, *Annadóra, Annaflóra, Annaliza, Annamari, Annaréka, Annaróza, Annasára, Annavirág, Máriaróza*, or the compound formations of two either common words or first names and common words, for instance, *Csillagvirág, Tűzvirág*.

2.2. The cluster of male names

There were fewer male names in the applications but their variety is similar to the female ones.

a) There are first names with foreign origin in greatest numbers, mainly English names (*Brandó, Brendon, Deján, Doren, Eliot, Krisztofer, Szkott etc.*), but there are also given names originating from other languages (*Adin, David, Jáfet, Adonisz, Alexandros, Ámor, André, Benitó, Frederik, Daren, Keán, Boga, Nyikita*).

b) The old Hungarian names are present as well, like for instance *Ajándok, Balmaz, Bojta, Csikó, Jutocsa, Magor, Solt, Som, Táltos, Tege, Torda, Turul, Vata, Zápor, Zolta*.

Several first names were prohibited from official registration because of their spelling or meaning by the linguistic institute (e.g. female names: *Kiskegyed, Dakota, Csiperke, Bolivia, India, Szindy*, male names: *Dodi, Öcsi, Kisherceg, de Vit, Misel, Sonny etc.*).

3. The need for a new book of first names

We can ascertain by examining the table illustrating the number of applied forenames that the number of applications drastically dropped in the years of 1994 and 1995. This is related to

the new regulations of the first name-giving process, namely the changes in society developed a need for enlarging the data of first names. LADÓ's book was not able to fulfil these needs any more. Therefore, in 1993 a new register was published by Szemimpex at the initiation of the Ministry of the Interior which has become renowned by now. This database contained 10 000 first names without the application of any selection criteria. Thus the registrars were allowed to register any of these names neglecting the narrower list in Ladó's book. But this long list was compiled by collecting all the citizens' first name and their mother's name possessing a personal identification number from the National Data Bank of Addresses and Personal data. Furthermore, it contained a lot of first names with foreign spelling (*Awa, Chkheor, Märy, Wawrzyniecz*) and certain names had several name forms in it as well (*Anastasia, Anasztazia, Anasztaszija, Anasztaszja, Anasztazia, Anasztásia, Anasztászia, Anasztázia*).

So, this list created chaos because any kind of first name under the sun was allowed to be registered. Forceful protests were made by linguists and registrars. Finally this roll of names was withdrawn in 1996, and at the same time a new one was published, the New Hungarian Roll of Names (BÍRÓ, 1997) which had a larger selection of names available than in Ladó's book. It also took into consideration both the Hungarian tradition and the latest needs in this field. The new roll of names included 883 (637 female and 252 male) more first names than the previous and contained 2710 registerable names in total. In 1998 JÁNOS LADÓ and ÁGNES BÍRÓ edited *The Book of Hungarian First Names* (LADÓ-BÍRÓ 1998) which presented most of these newly registerable names in details as well. However, this does not mean that since then every single parent has been able to find the most suitable first name for his/her offspring. Parents still have the possibility of applying for specialist reports at the Research Institute for Linguists if they chose an unauthorised one. The number of applications has currently dropped. There is an average of 100-150 applications every year and the applied forenames are distributed almost equally between genders. The rate of first names approved for registration is growing because the language institute represents a liberal, permissive view in approving applications. This process reaches extremities when sometimes a trade mark/brand is authorised for registration as a personal first name. That is how it happened that a little boy has the name *Lexus*, a car brand.

4. After joining the European Union

After Hungary had joined the European Union in 2004 new law was introduced regulating the method of first name registrations. On 1st January 2004 a new law came into force which on

the on hand reinforced the existing rules but made them more rigorous on the other. It was permissive because it stated ‘that parents who are members of an ethnic minority are allowed to choose first names in harmony with their ethnicity and have the right to change their own first name to an ethnic one; furthermore, they have the right to get their given and family name officially registered according to the spelling rules of their ethnic language.’ However, there were no laws in force restricting the registration of ethnic names requested by the members of the officially recognised thirteen ethnic minorities. In other words, if somebody considered himself to be a member of an ethnic minority, he was free to register any kind of first name without applying restricting spelling rules. But since 2004 members of ethnic minorities are allowed to choose first names only from the database published by the national organ of local governments for the ethnic minority in question (S. DÁVID EMESE 2004). Consequently, if somebody cannot find the desired first name for his offspring in the database mentioned, he will be entangled in the labyrinth of bureaucracy; in other words, the chosen first name must be officially approved by the local governments of ethnic minorities. This regulation in a way is equitable; i.e. why should anybody enjoy more rights in a country only because he is a member of an ethnic minority.

It is my personal question, bolstered also by most of my fellow researchers working in the field of onomastics, that we don't only regulate, but over-regulate in Hungary the process of choosing given names. Why do people have to wait 60-90 days for the results of their applications? If we are already following the rules and practice of the European Union then the question arises why we are not more permissive, why we not dare to adopt the already competent rules and practices of other European countries.

None of the Hungarian rules of this area protects the interests of children. Nobody has pointed out that children have to put up with the consequences of their comic constellation of their given and family names (e.g. *Zöld Pálma* ‘green palm’, *Száraz Virág* ‘dry flower’, *Karácsonyi Ajándék* ‘Cristhmes present’, *Kis Álmos* ‘little sleepy’ etc.).

5. Prospects: Ways of going ahead?

In spite of strict regulations the Hungarian database of names is increasingly enriched by new first names (e.g. in 2003 parents chose more than 300 kinds of new first names for girls and more then 200 for boys). Two tendencies can be detected in the quantitative enlargement of his database. One is derived from fashion consisting of fashionable names disseminated by the media and television series. The other is cherished by the intention of cultivating the Hungarian tradition and preserving national identity. This duality is illustrated

by the name statistics of year 2004 (Table 4) in which the two trends are clearly differentiated but they go hand in hand with each other. For instance, the male *Dávid, Dániel, Tamás, Patrik, Martin* and the *Laura, Anna, Emma, Vivien* female first names can be found both in Western European and American name lists. At the same time it is noticeable that increasingly more people choose typical Hungarian first names like *Bence, Máté, Levente, Gergő, Bálint* for boys and *Réka, Boglárka, Virág, Luca, Jázmin* for girls.

Male new born's given names	As their first given name	As their second given name	Female new born's given names	As their first given name	As their second given name
Bence	1889	307	Anna	1414	697
Máté	1571	332	Viktória	1059	257
Balázs	1409	222	Réka	1031	198
Dávid	1390	271	Vivien	1007	196
Dániel	1325	304	Zsófia	978	205
Levente	1264	272	Petra	975	165
Tamás	1193	330	Dorina	946	149
Ádám	1176	176	Fanni	924	164
Péter	1168	391	Boglárka	920	164
Gergő	1162	139	Eszter	898	239
Bálint	1137	141	Lili	859	153
Márk	1040	466	Laura	781	198
Zoltán	950	484	Dóra	698	119
Dominik	946	213	Alexandra	694	125
László	926	578	Noémi	633	120
Gábor	836	367	Nóra	607	93
Attila	833	429	Virág	552	219
Kristóf	826	161	Luca	542	126
Patrik	796	168	Evelin	539	99
Martin	784	126	Jázmin	536	122

Table 4. *The most frequently chosen first names in 2004*

When examining the numbers indicating the frequency of each first name a prominent change can be detected concerning the frequency of the names on the top of these lists.

What can be expected in the future? It is likely that fashionable names which appear in great numbers will disappear and two divergent tendencies will develop and flourish. Namely, on the one hand a cluster of parents will choose first names of foreign origin, familiar in European languages, but completely unknown in their family, while the other group by their choice will continue to promote familial traditions and endeavour to retain the Hungarian base of first names on the other.

IV. Summary

To conclude, since the second half of the 20th Century several kinds of legal regulations attempted to bias the development of the Hungarian first name data. However, none of them was powerful enough to frustrate the needs of the civil needs and wishes. Consequently the changes in the Hungarian data of first names were generated by individual and social needs and tastes.

As a result of a close analysis made on the quantitative and qualitative changes in the first name data of the last half century it can be stated that currently in Hungary there are two distinguishable trends in the choice of names:

1. Gradually more variants of first names with a foreign origin are frequently chosen and
2. traditional first names are revived and disseminated.

This process is in complete harmony with the dilemma arising in many other fields as well which is generated by the issue of Hungary's role as a member state of the European Union.

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