Sound symbolism in translation

A case study of character names
in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*

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Readers may infer that literary characters are sympathetic or unsympathetic based on the perceived phonetics of character names. Drawing on brand name literature in marketing, we investigate whether Slovene and English speakers can identify sympathetic and unsympathetic characters in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* based solely on their names, despite being unfamiliar with the novel. Both Slovene and English speakers can make this distinction, suggesting that sound symbolism may help communicate Dickens's intended characterizations. Dickens's documented focus on creating meaningful names suggests the sound symbolism in his characters' names is likely intentional. These findings are relevant to the translating convention of preserving proper names, which leaves spelling intact (given similar alphabets). Preserving the original names in translation may be justified for readers fluent enough to perceive the original name sounds. However, not altering character names in translation may sometimes lead to different phonetic perceptions, which alter the sound symbolic meaning.

Keywords: sound symbolism, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, Slovene, proper names

Introduction

Dickens exhibited a distinctive flair for naming his creations. For instance, the title of his illustrated monthly, the *Pickwick Papers*, features both assonance and consonance (both the /p/ and /Ik/ sounds are repeated). Recent research in marketing validates Dickens's instincts, finding that such sound repetition triggers positive emotional responses (Argo, Popa, and Smith 2010).

In her biography of the writer, Jane Smiley observed that Dickens "kept lists of names, noticed names in graveyards and newspapers. He was careful to name everything, including the periodicals he founded, before attempting anything further" (2002: 47). If authors like Dickens intend for carefully crafted names to convey specific sound symbolic meanings, then the question arises whether these meanings are best preserved through rendering the names as they appear in the original or attempting to adapt their spelling in translation. Manini (1996) acknowledged the difficulty of translating names and argued that the translation of proper nouns endowed with an extra semantic load is not only a technically difficult task but also a questionable translation procedure. Such is the case when meaning is conveyed semantically in names such as "Joy" and "Earnest." However, beyond the problem of translating lexically meaningful names, there is reason to wonder whether language-spanning sounds (i.e., phonemes with sound symbolic meanings) provide a mechanism for communicating nuances across languages when translation preserves the original sounds.

Sound symbolism

The notion of sound symbolism may have been first addressed in the *physis-nomos* dispute in Plato's *Cratylus* dialog, wherein Socrates suggests that words fit their referents by virtue of their component sounds or letters. Similarly, Cratylus's speculation that there is a single best name for a thing in multiple languages based on a name's natural connection with a thing is an early conjecture about sound symbolism. This theory still holds currency and yields robust effects. In one study, roughly 95% of English, Swahili, and Bantu speakers shown a round shape and an angular shape (Figure 1) and asked which was called "Bouba" and which was called "Kiki," responded that the angular shape is Kiki and the round shape is Bouba, demonstrating that sounds can convey meaning across languages (Köhler 1929; Maurer, Pathman, and Mondloch 2006).
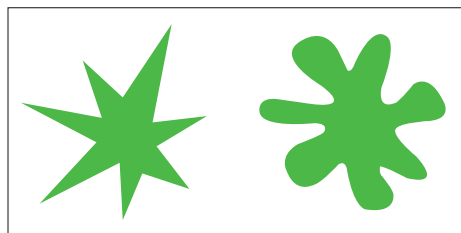

Figure 1. Typical angular and round shapes similar to those used in Köhler's (1929) original study

Although sound symbolism has a controversial history (French 1977; Bentley and Varon 1933) evidence for sound symbolic effects has been documented in linguistics (Revill, Namy, DeFife, and Nygaard 2014), anthropology (Eckert 2012), psychology (Spence 2011), and marketing (Guevremont and Grohmann 2014). In particular, recent work in marketing has illuminated the influence of sound symbolism on brand attitudes. For instance, brand names with front vowels like /i/ (e.g., /vīsə/) – produced in the front of the mouth – seem smaller, lighter, thinner, faster, colder, more feminine, friendlier, weaker, and lighter than names with back vowels like /o/ (e.g., /kokə kolə/; Klink 2000). The notion of front vowel smallness and friendliness is fundamental to the way many languages generate endearing nicknames; diminutives are formed by adding /i/ (English), /iko/ or /ito/ (Spanish), and /ino/ (Italian; Brown 1958). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the front vowel /i/ is the most common vowel sound among top brand names (Pogacar et al. 2015). The back vowel /a/ (as in /starbəks/) is similarly appealing when used in brand names (Lowrey and Schrum 2007). Brand name sound symbolism may thus offer insights into literary characters' names and how readers of translations perceive them, because brand names and character names belong to the common category of proper nouns. Furthermore, since sound symbolism has been found to operate across languages (Nygaard, Cook, and Namy 2009; Ohala 1984; Revill, Namy, DeFife, and Nygaard 2014; Tanz 1971), it is likely relevant to the translation of proper names.

Dickens at times conveyed character traits semantically. For instance, to portray 'sparkling' and likable personality, he used character names such as Mr. Crisparkle. Dickens also used sound symbolism, however, as a less obvious method to impart meaning. It is not our intention to minimize the significance of other linguistic devices, such as semantic associations, which Dickens deployed to great effect. In the present research, however, we restrict our focus to the analysis of sound symbolism and its implications for translation studies.

Proper names in translation studies

Proper names have often been a subject of translation studies research, in the context of audiovisual translation (e.g., Hurtado 2009), interpreting (e.g., Meyer 2008), and different text types such as brochures and legal texts (e.g., Léchauguette 2011; Loiacono 2012; Valdeón 2009). According to a review of published articles in one of the most representative bibliographies in the field, the *Translation Studies Bibliography*, with more than 28,000 annotated records (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2008), translation of proper names has been most frequently discussed in relation to literature. For instance, scholars have examined problems such as

the transliteration of literary characters' names (Tsai 2014) in diverse contexts, including religious texts (Dastjerdi 2008), comic books (Delesse 2008), and dramatic works (Campillo 2002; Schultze 1991). Considerable attention has been paid to children's literature, in particular the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* series (Penrod 2010; Willems and Mussche 2010). However, literary translation scholarship dealing with sound symbolism is uncommon (exceptions being the examinations of onomatopoeic words, e.g., Brede 1999 and Jawad 2010), and to our knowledge, the issue of sound symbolism in proper name translation has not been addressed.

In regards to Charles Dickens, among the most prominent nineteenth-century English writers, more attention has been paid to the problems of translating different dialects and sociolects (Muller 2004; Czennia 1992) than to the translation of meaningful proper names. We therefore take up the study of Dickensian names in translation using a survey instrument to assess English and Slovene speakers' perceptions of character attributes. To the extent that Slovene speakers perceive the same sounds in the names as English speakers, sound symbolism should communicate the same meaning to both groups. If both English and Slovene speakers unfamiliar with a work perceive sympathetic characters positively and unsympathetic characters negatively, based solely on their names, this accurate perception would suggest that sound symbolism effectively communicates Dickens's intended characterizations.

Charles Dickens's character names in translation

Charles Dickens's works present an ideal opportunity to test sound symbolism in translation. Dickens invested heavily in linguistic aspects of characterization, beginning with naming. While he is best known for using characters' speech, including dialect, to convey personalities, his "powers are already evident not only in his narration and dialogue but in the initial process of christening his characters" (Ingham 2008: 126). Dickens often drew on his "vast knowledge of vocabulary and … the native speaker's silently acquired knowledge of *phonotactics* [emphasis in the original], the rules or patterns governing the combination of sounds in a given language" (Ingham 2008: 126). Paroissien (1999: 79) refers to Dickens's "delight in eccentric and ingenious sounds," such as the consonants /p/, /d/, /k/, and the ending /li/. Dickens thus sought to convey his characters' attributes by the sounds of their names.

The novel *Oliver Twist* is an appropriate context for examining the sound qualities of Dickens's character names in translation due to the notable degree of contrivance in characterization therein. The narrator thematizes naming early in

the novel, when the Beadle Bumble explains his system for naming orphan wards: "We name our fondlins in alphabetical order. The last was a S, – Swubble, I named him. This was a T, – Twist, I named *him*. The next one as comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet, and all the way through it again, when we come to Z" (Dickens 1993: 23). Early in his career Dickens was imagining his characters as much as describing people he had observed (Greene 1961: 247), resulting in the two-dimensional personalities of some (especially sympathetic) characters in *Oliver Twist*, including the hero himself. In general, Dickens was a master of manipulating external characteristics, as one of the leading Dickens scholars has observed:

> This stress on visual distinctiveness in the creation of characters relates to a criticism we often hear, that when Dickens constructs – rather than miraculously receives – his characters, he does so from the outside in and, having squandered so much on externals he either cannot or will not supply much in the way of an interior life. He invites the reader to infer an interior life by intelligent reading of prolific visual and auditory detail. (Andrews 2006: 72)

The heuristic sound symbolic meanings of character names may be an aspect of Dickens's emphasis on external representations of inward qualities.

Charles Dickens in Slovene translation

In Slovenia, there has been very little theoretical discussion concerning translation of proper names. In fact, the only semi-theoretical discussion to our knowledge followed the contested translations of the Tolkien trilogy and the Harry Potter books, both by the translator Branko Gradišnik. In the post-face to his translation of *Harry Potter,* he pleads for a more daring approach to the translation of meaningful proper names. This is in opposition to the traditional approach in Slovene literary translation of retaining the spelling of original proper names, even if the original names carry some extra semantic load, as was the case in certain works by Dickens (Gradišnik 2006).

The first and only Slovene translation of *Oliver Twist* appeared in 1911. The work was translated by Oton Župančič (1878–1949), the most celebrated poet of his era. Župančič worked in a time marked by stylistic pluralism combining Decadent elements with Impressionism, Symbolism, and Expressionism (Kos 1987: 146; Bernik 1987: 7; 1993: 13). Although the Slovene *Oliver Twist* has been reprinted four times since its first publication (1936, 1950, 1967, 1976), perhaps in part due to the high status of Župančič's translation, no other translation followed. The Slovene translation of *Oliver Twist* retains almost all the original proper names with no attempt to translate or transliterate them.

Župančič made extensive edits to the first edition of his translation of *Oliver Twist* (Dickens 1911), including the consistent affixation of the feminine suffix *–eva* to female characters' surnames. We have not tested for perceptions of this change. There is also one instance in the novel of nickname translation: Župančič translates Artful Dodger as Lisjak, or "one who has foxlike characterstics." In general, his translation captures the Victorian literary style of the narrator's voice, but does not attempt to convey dialect and sociolect features.

Nine novels by Charles Dickens have been translated into Slovene, with all but one being geared toward an educated, adult audience. Dickens is typically presented as a canonical author of British literature, affording his works with publication in prestigious collections that are accompanied by lengthy forewords written by prominent literary critics. Slovene translations of Dickens's novels are therefore intended mainly for educated readers who generally expect to find characters' names unaltered in translation.

As a result, this study examines whether the sound symbolism in Dickens's character names is achieved in translation using experimental methods established for cross-cultural brand name research. This allows us to explore a new aspect of proper nouns in translation.

Method

We examine sound symbolism in the names of eight main characters in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*: Oliver Twist, Fagin, Artful Dodger, Bill Sikes, Nancy, Mr. Brownlow, Rose Maylie, and Charley Bates. We limited the number of characters to avoid survey fatigue, but future research may wish to examine other characters as a means of potentially replicating findings. We are careful, however, to include representatives of sympathetic, unsympathetic, and ambiguous characters for comparison. In the case of Artful Dodger, we test Slovene speakers' reactions to the sound symbolism of the original, untranslated, name.

Selecting specific characteristics to evaluate is less straightforward. We take guidance from Smiley's biography, however, which states that, "Dickens always ridiculed the Evangelical impulse to look for sinfulness and evil nature, instead interpreting kindness, fellow-feeling, charitableness, and social conscience as virtues" (2002: 48). Additionally, some characters, such as Fagin and Artful Dodger, are explicitly described as extremely unattractive, whereas others, such as Rose Maylie, are described as beautiful. We therefore measure the extent to which English and Slovene speakers unfamiliar with the story perceive each character to be attractive, kind, generous, honest, and generally likable.

Sympathetic characters

1. *Oliver Twist* is the title character of the novel, an orphan who flees the cruel workhouse for London where he is adopted and receives an inheritance in Dickensian fashion.
2. *Mr. Brownlow* is a kind, older man who helps Oliver before being revealed to be Oliver's great uncle and finally adopting him.
3. *Nancy* is a prostitute and former thief. She is fond of Oliver and ultimately loses her life protecting him.
4. *Rose Maylie* is a kind and beautiful young woman who is later revealed to be Oliver's aunt. Maylie is a dramatic foil to Nancy who is approximately the same age but lives in sadly different circumstances.

Unsympathetic characters

1. *Fagin* is a receiver of stolen goods with a "villainous-looking and repulsive face" (Dickens 1993: 65) who cares little for the children he trains to steal for his benefit. Interestingly, the apparent anti-Semitism Dickens exhibited in describing Fagin, "the Jew," is a rare black mark on the author's memory. Dickens himself seems to have subsequently regretted his characterization, and in later editions omitted over a hundred references to Fagin's Jewishness (Nunberg 2001). The name Fagin derives from the German name Feige, meaning "violet" and was a common name among German Jews before the mid-eighteenth century (Kaganoff 1997; Paroissien 1984). According to his Autobiographical Fragment (Forster 1904), Dickens "took the liberty" of borrowing the name from an orphan who was kind to him when they worked together. Why would Dickens name a loathsome character after a person he claims to have liked? Perhaps Dickens recognized certain unappealing phonetic qualities in the name and saw its potential for representing an unappealing character.
2. *Bill Sikes* is vicious and violent; he regularly beats his dog and ultimately beats Nancy to death. Unlike Fagin, who is pitiable, Sikes is a rare Dickensian character described as truly, deeply evil. Describing Sikes's murder of Nancy, Dickens writes: "Of all bad deeds that … had been committed within wide London's bounds… of all the horrors that rose with an ill scent upon the morning air, that was the foulest and most cruel" (Dickens 1993: 317).

Ambiguous characters

1. *Artful Dodger* is a child pickpocket who is friendly toward Oliver Twist, but also betrays him. Artful Dodger is described as having "little, sharp, ugly eyes" (Dickens 1993: 62) and a cunning character.
2. *Charlie Bates* is a child thief and sidekick to Artful Dodger. Although he is initially a criminal, Charlie is described as good at heart, and ultimately reforms becoming "the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire" (Dickens 1993: 359).

Hypotheses

Since sound symbolism can convey similar meaning to speakers of different languages (Nygaard, Cook, and Namy 2009; Ohala 1984; Revill, Namy, DeFife, and Nygaard 2014; Tanz 1971), if Dickens's names were crafted to convey positive or negative characteristics, we may predict, (assuming Slovene speakers' familiarity with English pronunciation), that:

H1:   Character names will influence character evaluations by both Slovene and English speakers unfamiliar with the novel.
H2:   Both Slovene and English speakers unfamiliar with the novel will rate sympathetic characters more positively than unsympathetic characters based only on their names.

Regarding the ambiguous characters Artful Dodger and Charlie Bates, we make no predictions.

We propose that Slovene and English speakers should perceive similar sound symbolic meaning because the Slovene participants in our study are sufficiently aware of English spelling conventions to accurately imagine approximate English pronunciations.[1] Sound symbolism in this sample of character names may operate via the following paths.

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1.   Twenty-eight of the Slovene students who participated in the study pronounced each test name for a coder trained in phonetic transcription. With the exception of one participant, who differed in the last sound of the name Rose Maylie, all pronunciations were as follows: Oliver Twist [ɔlɪvər twɪst]; Rose Maylie [roz mejli]; Nancy [nænsi]; Charlie Bates [tʃɑrli bejts]; Brownlow [brawnlou]; Fagin [fegɪn]; Bill Sikes [bɪl sajks]; Artful Dodger [ɑrtfəl dɔdʒɜr].

Vowels

Vowel sound symbolism research suggests that names with the /a/ sound (as in "l_a_tté") are generally well liked (Lowrey and Shrum 2007). Therefore, English speakers should respond positively to the sympathetic character Oliver Twist, and ambiguous characters Charlie Bates and Artful Dodger. By the same mechanism, Slovenes should respond positively to Charlie Bates and Artful Dodger. Given that Slovene speakers pronounce the first phoneme in the name "Oliver" as /ɔ/ (like "c_a_ll"), it is reasonable to predict that Slovenes might perceive the name Oliver favorably for the same reason English speakers do. Specifically, the /a/ and /ɔ/ sounds are similar open, long, tense vowels (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2010: 205; Skandera and Burleigh 2005: 35), therefore, if /ɔ/ is for Slovene speakers what /a/ is for English speakers, then the appealing sound symbolic properties should lead Slovenes to evaluate Oliver positively. Finally, the /i/ sound (as in "sk_i_"), being the most common vowel sound among top brand names (Pogacar et al. 2015), may enhance both English and Slovene speakers' perceptions of the characters Rose Maylie, Nancy, and Charlie Bates.

Plosives

Plosives, such as /p/, /b/, /t/ and /d/, are produced by stopping airflow through the mouth. Brand names with plosives as the first sound are more memorable (Lowrey, Shrum and Dubitsky 2003), recognizable, and easily recalled (Cortese 1998). This may explain why word-initial plosives are so common among brand names (Pogacar et al. 2015; Vanden Bergh, Adler, and Oliver 1987). However, plosives have been more common among words that participants rated unpleasant (Johnson, Suzuki, and Olds 1964) or "bad" (Jenkins, Russell, and Suci 1958). In this instance, then, it is possible that plosives may benefit brand names (by enhancing memorability) more than they benefit sympathetic character names. If so, this may influence both English and Slovene speakers' perceptions of Brownlow and Bill Sikes, in particular, because these character names feature highly salient word-initial plosives.

Fricatives

Fricatives, such as /s/ and /z/, are produced by restricting, but not stopping, airflow through the mouth. The presence of word-initial fricatives in political candidates' names has been negatively associated with election results (Smith 1998). Thus, both English and Slovene speakers may form negative impressions of the character name Fagin.

We conducted a study to assess whether Slovene and English speakers respond to the unaltered character names from *Oliver Twist* as the author would have intended; in other words, whether Slovene and English speakers with no prior knowledge of the story perceive the sympathetic characters positively, and the unsympathetic characters negatively, based only on their names.

Study: Does sound symbolism influence readers' perceptions of literary characters?

If sound symbolism influences readers' perceptions of characters in line with Dickens's intended characterization, then both Slovene and English speakers unfamiliar with the novel should be able to identify the main sympathetic and unsympathetic characters based only on their names. We therefore showed Slovene- and English-speaking participants the eight main character names from Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and asked them to indicate their perceptions of each character across five dimensions (likable, honest, attractive, kind, and generous).

Participants

The Slovene participants were carefully selected to represent a contemporary target audience for Dickens's novels in Slovenia. Everyone who has completed secondary education in Slovenia has studied English for nine years and reached intermediate high (B2) proficiency. Therefore, Slovene readers of Dickens in translation may be expected to be sufficiently familiar with the principles of English pronunciation to perceive similar pronunciation of character names as native speakers. Slovene participants in the present research reflect this intended audience: they were familiar with the principles of English pronunciation, but had not yet read the works by Charles Dickens. All Slovene participants had passed the Slovene national post-secondary matriculation exam meaning their level of English proficiency is at least intermediate high in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.[2] This means that the participants were able to "interact with a degree

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2.   Suzana Bitenc Peharc in Tratnik, Alenka (2014). Umestitev nacionalnih izpitov iz angleščine v skupni evropski jezikovni okvir : zaključno poročilo o izvedbi projekta. [Reconciling English language examinations with the common european framework for languages: Final report on the implementation of the project] Ljubljana: Državni izpitni center. http://bit.ly/2fXfTXp Last accessed 30 November 2016.

of fluency … that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party."[3]

In addition, all Slovene participants had completed a one-semester undergraduate course in English phonetics and phonology, gaining "familiarity with the fundamentals of English phonetics/phonology, the standard pronunciation of English (RP), the features of the English vowels and consonants, as well as the prosodic features of the English language."[4]

Finally, to confirm the Slovene participants' phonological interpretations of Dickens's character names, Slovene students who participated in the present research pronounced each test name for a coder trained in phonetic transcription (see footnote 4).

Procedure

We collected data from Slovene and English speakers separately. Fifty Slovene-speaking students ranging in age from 18–25 at the University of Ljubljana (61.5% Female; mean age = 19.49) were recruited on campus to participate in the study as volunteers. Forty-two English-speaking participants (57.1% male; mean age = 33.40) ranging in age from 20–57 were recruited from the United States using Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) to complete an online survey in exchange for twenty-cents of Amazon.com credit. Participants were presented with each character name in random order and asked to respond to the statement "The name _____ seems [likable, honest, attractive, kind, generous]" on a Likert scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). Participants evaluated each of the eight main characters in Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (Oliver Twist, Rose Maylie, Nancy, Brownlow, Fagin, Bill Sikes, Artful Dodger, and Charley Bates). For each character the rating average across all five traits produced adequate internal reliability scores (α = .76–.95, see Figure 2a and Figure 2b; see Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel 2007 on estimates for Cronbach's alpha).

In the Slovene version, the names were based on the translation by Župančič, except for the name Artful Dodger, which was tested in its original, untranslated form (i.e., as "Artful Dodger"). We also assessed Slovene speakers' English proficiency based on three items: 'How well do you understand English?'; 'How fluently do you speak English?'; and 'How often do you hear English?' (average proficiency was roughly six on a seven-point scale for each item). We then asked participants if

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3. Common European Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching Assessment, Table 1, p. 24, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf. Last accessed 30 November 2016.

4. English I. Department of Translation. University of Ljubljana. http://www.prevajalstvo.net/mainsubject/5. Last accessed 30 November 2016.

they were familiar with Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Eleven Slovenes who had read the novel were excluded from analysis. Amazon mTurk participants were instructed to take the survey only if they were unfamiliar with the novel, and consequently none of the English-speaking participants were excluded from analysis. Finally, after they had rated each character on each dimension, we collected standard demographics and thanked participants for their time.[5] Survey instruments (in English and in Slovene) are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Results

In this section we analyze evaluations of specific traits within characters, differences in overall evaluations between characters, and two models that support our hypotheses.

Analysis of individual character perceptions

Comparisons of each character's ratings were tested in two dimensions. First, each individual score was tested using an independent *t*-test for statistically significant differences from the midpoint of 4. For instance, in Table 2a, Oliver Twist's score on the dimension "Likable" differs significantly from 4, but the same character's score for "Honesty" is not statistically significant. Second, the characters were compared to each other using paired-samples *t*-tests within each trait. These results are displayed in each row of Table 2a (for Slovene participants) and Table 2b (for English-speaking participants). For instance, on the dimension "Likable," Oliver Twist and Nancy do not differ at a statistically significant level, as shown by the common superscript "a." Meanwhile, Oliver Twist and Fagin do differ on that dimension; the superscript for Oliver Twist is "a," while for Fagin it is "d." All *p*-values are adjusted for multiple comparisons with the Bonferroni correction to help control for Type I error.

To examine how participants perceived each character, individually, we analyzed each character's overall rating (the average of all five traits) relative to the midpoint, using one sample t-tests with a null hypothesis mean of 4. Both native Slovene- and English-speaking participants rate each sympathetic character, except Mr. Brownlow, positively (i.e., above the midpoint), whereas the unsympathetic character Fagin is rated negatively by both Slovene- and English-speaking participants (i.e., below the midpoint). Finally, the ambiguous characters (Artful Dodger and Charlie Bates) are similarly split in both samples (Figures 2a and 2b).

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5.   The survey instruments in English and Slovene are available from the first author upon request.

Table 2a. Mean perceived character traits among Slovene participants. (Midpoint = 4 on a scale anchored at 1 and 7)

	Sympathetic				Unsympathetic		Ambiguous	
	Oliver Twist	Rose Maylie	Nancy	Brownlow	Fagin	Bill Sikes	Artful Dodger	Charley Bates
Likable	***5.56 [a]	***6.00 [b]	***5.54 [ab]	3.67 [c]	***2.49 [d]	3.59 [c]	3.38 [c]	***5.36 [a]
	(1.25)	(.85)	(1.48)	(1.84)	(1.41)	(1.49)	(1.60)	(1.22)
Honest	4.69 [ab]	***5.21 [a]	***5.03 [a]	3.87 [b]	***2.87 [c]	3.77 [b]	***3.03 [c]	**4.59 [ab]
	(1.60)	(1.21)	(1.30)	(1.57)	(1.21)	(1.20)	(1.38)	(1.20)
Attractive	**4.79 [a]	***5.31 [a]	***5.08 [a]	3.36 [b]	***2.15 [c]	3.51 [b]	**3.08 [b]	4.64 [a]
	(1.53)	(1.52)	(1.72)	(1.56)	(1.14)	(1.43)	(1.56)	(1.61)
Kind	***5.46 [a]	***5.82 [a]	***5.51 [a]	3.82 [c]	***2.95 [d]	3.82 [c]	***3.03 [d]	***5.05 [b]
	(1.19)	(0.99)	(1.32)	(1.54)	(1.19)	(1.25)	(1.61)	(1.15)
Generous	**4.64 [a]	***5.23 [a]	***5.15 [a]	3.67 [b]	***3.08 [c]	3.67 [b]	***2.85 [c]	**4.67 [a]
	(1.29)	(1.37)	(1.20)	(1.63)	(1.20)	(1.18)	(1.46)	(1.18)
Average	***5.03 [a]	***5.51 [b]	***5.26 [ab]	3.68 [c]	***2.70 [d]	3.67 [cd]	***3.07 [c]	***4.86 [a]
	(1.11)	(.88)	(1.00)	(128)	(.96)	(1.05)	(1.18)	(1.00)

Table 2b. Mean perceived character traits among native English-speaking participants. (Midpoint = 4 on a scale anchored at 1 and 7)

	Sympathetic				Unsympathetic		Ambiguous	
	Oliver Twist	Rose Maylie	Nancy	Brownlow	Fagin	Bill Sikes	Artful Dodger	Charley Bates
Likable	***5.33 [a]	***5.48 [a]	***5.38 [a]	4.29 [bc]	3.33 [c]	3.69 [bc]	3.64 [bc]	4.64 [b]
	(1.43)	(1.17)	(1.40)	(1.85)	(1.63)	(1.59)	(1.89)	(1.67)
Honest	4.69 [ac]	***5.88 [b]	***5.90 [b]	4.79 [ac]	3.48 [d]	3.86 [c]	***2.74 [d]	4.64 [ac]
	(1.87)	(1.88)	(1.67)	(1.95)	(1.84)	(1.92)	(1.68)	(1.71)
Attractive	4.17 [ac]	***5.79 [b]	4.19 [ac]	***3.12 [cd]	**3.10 [cd]	***3.26 [cd]	3.69 [cd]	4.19 [ac]
	(1.67)	(1.09)	(1.61)	(1.44)	(1.72)	(1.33)	(1.57)	(1.50)
Kind	**4.74 [ab]	***5.38 [a]	***5.17 [a]	4.19 [bc]	3.38 [cd]	3.55 [cd]	***3.14 [d]	4.10 [bc]
	(1.38)	(1.29)	(1.38)	(1.47)	(1.61)	(1.29)	(1.42)	(1.50)
Generous	4.43 [a]	***5.31 [b]	***4.83 [ab]	4.09 [a]	3.43 [cd]	**3.36 [cd]	***2.83 [d]	4.02 [ac]
	(1.48)	(1.26)	(1.25)	(1.71)	(1.78)	(1.38)	(1.50)	(1.54)
Average	**4.67 [ac]	***5.56 [b]	***5.09 [ab]	4.10 [cd]	**3.34 [d]	3.54 [cd]	***3.20 [d]	4.32 [c]
	(1.26)	(1.11)	(1.21)	(1.38)	(1.56)	(1.18)	(1.25)	(1.30)

The table displays the mean score for each character and each trait with standard deviations in parentheses. ** and *** denote raw significance levels of 5% and 1%, respectively, for *t*-tests comparing each cell of the table to the midpoint of the scale. The *p*-values are corrected using Bonferroni's correction

Different superscripts denote statistical significance of paired *t*-tests among the characters by labeling groups of characters with statistically similar scores. As an example, Oliver Twist, Rose Maylie, and Nancy have statistically indistinguishable scores for likability (superscript "a"), and Brownlow and Charlie Bates have statistically indistinguishable scores for likability ("b"), whereas Oliver Twist ("a") and Fagin ("c") have significantly different scores on the same trait. All comparisons are made at the 5% significance level, adjusted with Bonferroni's correction.
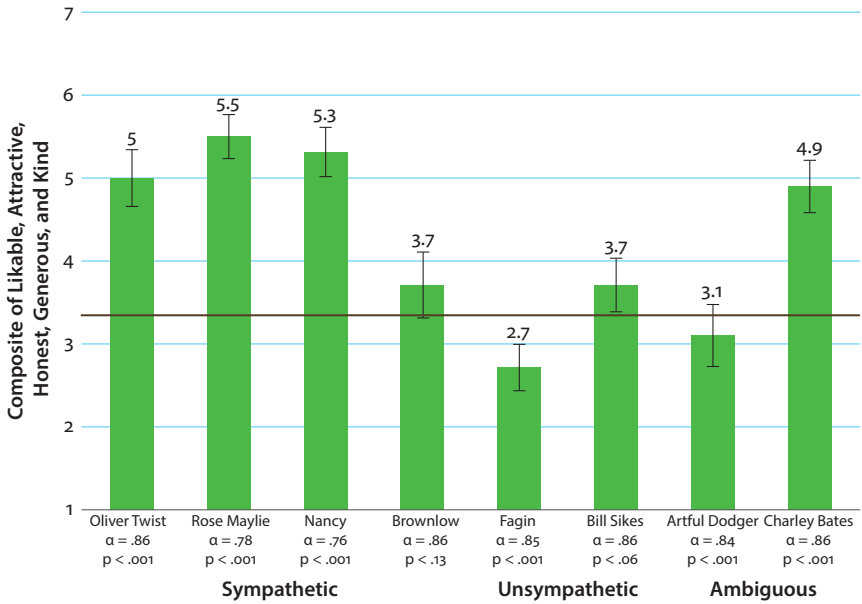
Figure 2a. Univariate analyses of character perceptions among Slovene speakers unfamiliar with Oliver Twist
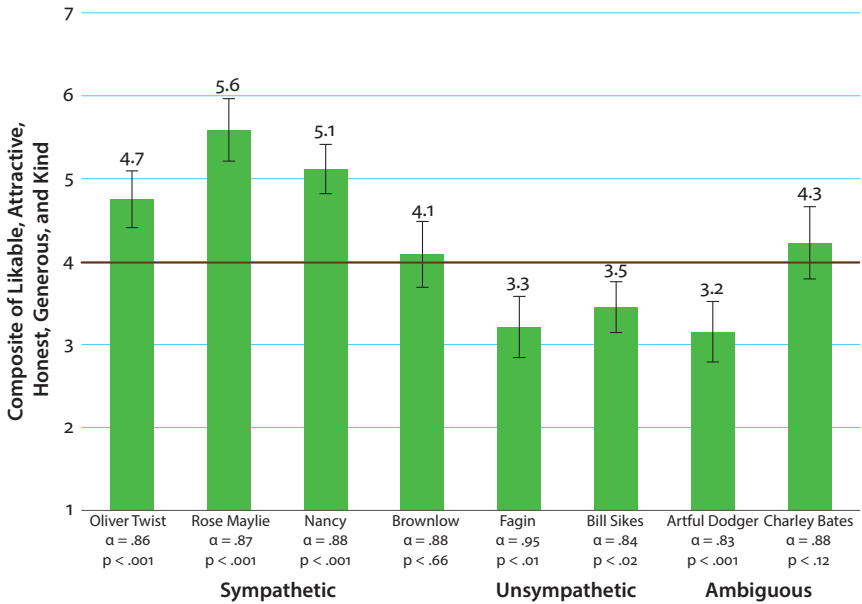

Figure 2b. Univariate analyses of overall character perceptions among English speakers unfamiliar with Oliver Twist

Analysis of ratings based on character names

To test our hypothesis that character names influenced participants' ratings of characters, we ran a series of separate models for Slovene and English-speaking samples using the built-in linear model functions as well as the linear mixed model functions in lme4 package (Bates 2005; Bates and Maechler 2009) in the statistical software R (version 3.2.3; R Development Core Team 2009). Our input dataset consisted of the ratings of all eight character names on all five traits (i.e., likable, honest, etc., measured on seven-point scales), character name, and participant ID for 39 Slovene and 42 English-speaking participants. Rating is a numeric variable and trait, participant, and character name are factors.

We first ran a multiple linear regression model with character name, trait (i.e., likable, honest, etc.), and individual participant id as predictors of character ratings. Character name had a significant effect on character rating, but some levels of trait and participant were significantly associated with character rating, whereas others were not. Furthermore, the low adjusted R^2 indicated that the model did not adequately explain the variance. A low adjusted R^2 could be due to over parameterization, which may be remedied by using a mixed effect model.

Therefore, to account for participant and trait level variability, and over parameterization, we next ran a series of linear mixed effect models. The best fitting model included character name (without interaction term) as the fixed effect, character trait as random effect, and separate intercepts for each participant as random effects. Robustness checks indicate that this model is significantly different from all the alternative models examined. It also produces the lowest Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC), indicating that it better represents the data than alternative models. Analysis of residuals indicates that all model assumptions are satisfied.

We obtained p-values using likelihood ratio tests comparing the full model with character name as a predictor against the model without character name. Results indicate that characters' names influence both native Slovene ($\chi^2[7] = 75.584$, $p < .001$) and English speakers' ($\chi^2[7] = 59.623$, $p < .001$) perceptions of characters, supporting H1. Notably, including both Slovene and English speakers in the final model with language as a fixed effect showed no significant effect of language, indicating that participants responded similarly to the untranslated character names in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* regardless of native language.

Analysis of ratings based on character type

Based on these results, however, it is not clear whether participants rated sympathetic characters more highly than unsympathetic characters. To assess differences in participants' perceptions of sympathetic, unsympathetic, and ambiguous characters we ran another series of models for the separate Slovene and English samples with character type as the independent variable.

Our input dataset consisted of ratings based on the five traits (likable, honest, etc., measured on seven-point scales), character type (sympathetic, unsympathetic, and ambiguous), and participant id for 39 Slovene and 42 American participants. Rating is a numeric variable, and character type, trait, and participant id are factors.

The best fitting model included character type (without interaction term) as the fixed effect, character trait as random effect, and separate intercepts for each participant as random effects. Robustness checks indicate that this model is significantly different from all the alternative models examined. It also produces the lowest Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC), indicating that it better represents the data than alternative models. Analysis of residuals indicates that all model assumptions are satisfied.

We obtained p-values using likelihood ratio tests comparing the full model with character type as a predictor against the model without character type. Results indicate that both native Slovene ($\chi^2[2] = 65.147$, $p < .001$) and English speakers' ($\chi^2[2] = 47.859$, $p < .001$) perceptions of characters, based only on the characters' names, were predicted by the characters' status as sympathetic, non-sympathetic, or ambiguous. Furthermore, including both Slovene and English speakers in the final model with language as a fixed effect showed no significant effect of language, indicating that participants responded similarly to the untranslated character names in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* regardless of native language.

To better understand how character type predicted participants' perceptions of characters, we calculated p-values for pairwise comparisons between character types with a Tukey correction for multiple comparisons. Results show that Slovene speakers unfamiliar with *Oliver Twist* perceive sympathetic characters more positively than unsympathetic characters, based solely on their names ($t[98] = -11.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.56$). They also perceive sympathetic characters more positively than ambiguous characters ($t[98] = 6.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.19$), and ambiguous characters more positively than unsympathetic characters ($t[98] = -5.54$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.37$). English speakers unfamiliar with *Oliver Twist* also perceive sympathetic characters more positively than unsympathetic characters, based solely on their names ($t[82] = -8.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.79$), and perceive sympathetic characters more positively than ambiguous characters ($t[82] = 6.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.38$), supporting H2.

However, unlike Slovene speakers, English speakers do not perceive the ambiguous characters significantly more positively than the unsympathetic characters (t[82] = −1.84, p = .16, d = .41).

Discussion

Regardless of native language, participants unfamiliar with the novel *Oliver Twist* were similarly influenced by character names. Both Slovene and English speakers unfamiliar with the novel rated sympathetic characters more positively than unsympathetic characters based only on their names. This suggests that sound symbolic meaning, perhaps intentionally crafted by the author, influences readers' perceptions of characters. Notably, every name rated positively by participants contains one or both of the sounds /a/ and /i/, which past research suggests have positive sound symbolic properties (Lowrey and Shrum 2007; Pogacar et al. 2015).

The ambiguous character name Charlie Bates was perceived positively on each dimension by Slovene speakers, possibly due to the double-endowment of positive sound symbolism from the /a/ and /i/ sounds. However, Charlie Bates was not perceived as positively by English speakers as by Slovenes, possibly due to culture-specific semantic influences (e.g., the datedness of the name, or "Norman Bates" associations).

Artful Dodger, despite featuring a brief form of the /a/ sound, was perceived negatively by both native Slovene and English speakers, suggesting that the generally appealing /a/ sound may not always have positive associations, possibly due to the short form of the sound in this name. For Slovene speakers, the negative perceptions of Artful Dodger may also be due to the /d͡ʒ/ sound, which is unusual in Slovene. The unusual (to Slovene speakers) sound in the context of the name Dodger may be a perceptual factor, since unusual or unfamiliar words tend to be disliked (Alter and Oppenheimer 2006)

The name Nancy may be perceived as attractive by Slovene speakers but not English speakers because it sounds dated in English. Ironically, sound symbolism may preserve the original meaning better for non-native speakers in this instance. Alternatively, if Dickens did not intend to portray the character Nancy as attractive, yet the name conveys attractiveness to Slovene (but not English) speakers, this may suggest that sound symbolisms does not always translate neatly across languages.

Overall, English and Slovene speakers who were not familiar with the novel showed similar patterns of perceptions regarding the main sympathetic, unsympathetic, and ambiguous *Oliver Twist* characters, suggesting that sound symbolism may influence readers' perceptions of literary character names in translation.

General discussion

It would seem, then, that Dickens, who was known to have dedicated much time to crafting character names, deliberately imbued them with sound symbolic qualities representative of the characteristics he wished to convey. Thus, to the extent that readers perceive the intended pronunciations, sound symbolic meaning in characters' names appears to resonate among native and non-native readers alike. In some instances, this may justify the convention of preserving the original names in translation. It should be noted, however, that not altering character names in translation may sometimes lead to different perceived pronunciation, thereby altering the sound symbolic meaning.

Limitations and areas for future research

It must be noted that the present research is limited in its examination of only two languages – English and Slovene. There is reason to believe these findings will generalize more broadly, because many sounds have been shown to convey similar meanings across a variety of languages, including English and Albanian, Dutch, Gujarati, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Romanian, Tamil, Turkish, and Yoruba (Nygaard, Cook, and Namy 2009; Revill, Namy, DeFife, and Nygaard 2014; Tanz 1971).

Since the Slovene participants in the study were fluent in both Slovene and English, it is not possible to conclude that the sound symbolic meanings are the same in English and Slovene; in order to do so a control group of monolingual speakers of Slovene would have to be tested. We recognize that it is not possible in the present study to draw definitive conclusions regarding process. However, there are several reasons why the results obtained support the hypothesis of cross-language sound influence: while the speakers were fairly proficient second language speakers of English, they were by no means bilingual. Moreover, they all live in a monolingual (Slovene-speaking) environment; their first language (and natural choice) of reference would have been Slovene. Furthermore, the fact that the instrument for data collection was in Slovene and the participants had extensive familiarity and experience with English texts in Slovene translation both support the assumption that the speakers were able to process English names in a Slovene context. Finally, evidence suggests that second language proficiency is neither necessary nor preventative for the operation of cross-language sound symbolism. In one study, French, Spanish, and Chinese participants preferred the same sound symbolic words, independent of second language proficiency or whether they took the study in their first or second language (Shrum et al. 2012). Nevertheless,

additional research on the topic is needed to test sound symbolism involving monolingual groups as a means to corroborate the findings presented here.

It should be equally noted that since the present work, which focuses on Slovene readers of *Oliver Twist*, falls under the field of usability research in the context of translation studies (see Suojanen et al. 2015), our findings are necessarily restricted by methodology to a specific literary work and linguistic audience. This helps us demonstrate the consequences and the acceptability of certain proper name translation strategies in selected contexts. Although the present research should be expected to generalize to other linguistic and literary contexts, there will likely be exceptions and special cases that should be identified by further investigation. Similarly, examination of sound symbolism in translated texts by other authors would also greatly enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. Future research should therefore examine other literary genres, audiences, and translation strategies.

For instance, in the present context of a Slovene translation of *Oliver Twist*, the participants correspond to the contemporary intended audience of educated readers. Educated readers in Slovenia constitute a specific audience who would generally expect to find character names unaltered in translation. However, for younger audiences, such as children, more domesticating techniques for translating proper names might be preferred, because younger readers may not be familiar with the pronunciation of foreign names.

Broad claims regarding specific sound units are difficult to make because sound meaning is likely context dependent and interactive with surrounding sounds (Smith 1998). Sound symbolism may in some instances be confounded by cultural and semantic influences. In the present research, semantic associations may play a role, however it seems unlikely that this could fully explain the observed results since both English and Slovene speakers unfamiliar with the novel are unlikely to have similar meaningful associations with a nondescript name such as Bill Sikes. Similarly, sound symbolism may interact with other linguistic elements such as syllable structure. For instance, research suggests that name length can influence perceptions of character traits such as successfulness and cheerfulness (Mehrabian and Piercy 1993). However, the presence of both long and short sympathetic character names in our study, and the fact that participants perceived both the long and short character names positively (i.e., Nancy and Oliver Twist), suggests that name length cannot fully explain the present results. More research on the interplay among phonemes within words, as well as between sound symbolism and other sources of meaning, such as semantics, would enhance our understanding of the phenomenon and its implications for translation.

Conclusions

Regarding the controversial character name Fagin, Paroissien (1984: 44) asserts that "he whom Dickens called the devil by any other name would enjoy the same notoriety." Yet our findings suggest that the sound symbolism embedded in the name may have conspired with Dickens to turn an already phonetically unappealing name into a notorious one. Indeed, the present research suggests that sound symbolism may operate similarly for people with different first languages, and may thus influence people's perceptions of literary character names. Specifically, we find that character names influence character evaluations such that both Slovene and English speakers unfamiliar with the novel perceive the sympathetic characters more positively than the unsympathetic characters, based only on their names. This is consequential for translation studies, because authors like Dickens might intend for the sounds in the names they craft to convey meaning, and the translator's decisions about spelling can preserve or subvert those intentions.

Acknowledgments

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