

# Male and Female First Name Attribution Regarding Family Heritage, Catholic Calendar Influence, and Fashion in Tlalnepantla de Baz, Estado de México (México)

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the influence of Catholic calendar names, family nominal heritage and fashion on first name attribution of a Mexican community. The corpus analyzed (1,453 records) was gathered from birth certificates by taking representative samples for the synchronic cuts of 1930, 1960 and 1990. The overall aim was to try to recognize both general tendencies, and possible changes in first name attribution models throughout the 20th century.<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In México, it is commonly believed that first names are chosen in a chaotic and erratic way, that they are picked only because of parents' personal taste. Nevertheless, studies with different approaches have shown that the selection of given names is not an arbitrary nor a disordered act in which solely parents' predilections are evidenced, but a process in which certain social factors are taken into account (López Franco 2007, Aldrin 2011, Billy 2012); in other words, that first name attribution relates closely to the social, cultural, and historical context in which they are selected and used by the speakers (Caprini 2001). Such a relationship between first names and the space-time dimension in which they are chosen can become more evident by studying the selections already made, as they are actually registered on birth certificates; by doing so, we would be able not only to recognize the different nominal attribution models existent in a community, but also to have a closer look at their changes through a period of time.

At this moment, I would like to address first name attribution in regard to three social parameters: religion (particularly, with Catholic calendar and festivities), family heritage, and fashion. In order to try to recognize the influence these social factors had on first name attribution, I analyzed a corpus composed of 1,453 records (730 boys and 723 girls). The data was collected directly from birth certificates housed at the Registry Office number one of Tlalnepantla de Baz, Estado de México, by taking a representative sample of 10 per cent over the total registers for the synchronic cuts of 1930, 1960, and 1990. My hypothesis was that first name attribution models concurred throughout the 20th century, although there was a

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to take the opportunity to thank Dana McMillan and Daphne McAuley for checking my grammar and spelling in English.

tendency to prefer one or another depending on the extra-linguistic context in which names were chosen. By the sociolinguistic, onomastic and statistical analysis of the data I wanted to recognize which models were in use for each of the synchronic cuts, how they related to each other, and whether or not tendencies changed throughout the 20th century.

## **General Demographic and Social Characteristics of Tlalnepantla de Baz**

I decided to study the Spanish speaking community of Tlalnepantla de Baz because of its demographic and historical characteristics. Tlalnepantla is one of the municipalities of the Estado de México, which is one of the 31 states of México and part of the 32 federate entities that exist in the country. Tlalnepantla de Baz is located at the east side of the Estado de México, and it adjoins five other municipalities of the Estado de México as well as the Distrito Federal. In fact, the Distrito Federal physically divides the municipality of Tlalnepantla in two. For its geographic position, Tlalnepantla de Baz has been an important part of Mexico's trade and commerce routes since the very beginnings of the 20th century.

In the early 20th century, Tlalnepantla was composed mainly of villages and haciendas, and it was engaged in agriculture and livestock ranches, therefore its inhabitants were mostly farmers and day labourers. Since 1930, industry started changing the lifestyle and trades of the people who lived in the municipality; consequently, the region started having more factory workers and employees. Furthermore, the need for workers attracted many immigrants from different parts of the country (mainly from the Distrito Federal). By the 1960s, Tlalnepantla was an industrialized region, and the people living in it were mainly factory workers or employees. Nowadays, very much like in 1990, Tlalnepantla's main source of economy is industry, followed by commerce and increasing tourism. On the other hand, the municipality's most professed religion throughout the entire 20th century was Catholicism.<sup>2</sup>

## **Given Name Attribution Models Identified**

First name attribution models found in Tlalnepantla de Baz during the period established for our study were the following: a traditional model and a fashion-influenced model. Within the traditional model, two variants could be distinguished: Catholic calendar influence, and family nominal heritage. The impact the Catholic calendar had on first name attribution was established by comparing the name of the child registered and the information contained in the religious calendar by the day of the child's birthday. For example, a girl born on April 8 of 1930 was named *Alberta* because her birthday fell on the day of 'San Alberto de Jerusalén'. Cases for family nominal heritage were established by comparing the name of

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting how Tlalnepantla's inhabitants became increasingly more secular, onomastically speaking, as the 20th century progressed: secular in the sense of having less concern on Catholic names when giving a name to a newborn citizen of the community. People living in Tlalnepantla did not become 'less' Catholic nor Catholics decreased in number, but started taking into consideration other factors to name their children: separating their choices from evident religious influences.

children registered on birth certificates and the names of their close relatives, that is, their parents and their grandparents (from both their father's and mother's side). For example, a girl born in 1960 was named *Natalia* after her grandmother, whose name was also just *Natalia*. We only took account of parents and grandparents' names because it was the information registered on birth certificates.<sup>3</sup> Another first name attribution model found in Tlalnepantla was the fashion-influenced model, which was active during two of the cuts for girls, and only in the last one for boys, as we will see later on. Cases classified as part of this model were recognized by reconstructing the attribution cycles of the 20 most frequent names throughout the entire 20th century as well as of those most chosen during the three cuts studied. I was able to achieve this by taking the results obtained by López Franco (2010) concerning the main tendencies on first names attribution in Tlalnepantla de Baz. This way I could recognize that, for example, the name *Patricia* was in fashion for a period of time (from 1960 to 1975, but it peaked during 1960).

In addition to the above, I found a group of children whose registered names did not respond to any of the previous models; I decided to classify these cases as attributed by 'free choice'. For example, the name *Berta* given to a girl born on April 10, 1930 was not directly or indirectly connected with the name of any of her relatives or with any Catholic celebration close to the day of her birth, so it was considered a 'free choice'. However, I have to further explain that even though they are classified as 'free choices', I was still able to recognize that the great majority of the names considered in this category fell into what was identified as being the onomastic norm<sup>4</sup> of that community and period (even though they were not assigned by influence of the traditional model or because they were in fashion). Thus, if the rule in 1930 was to choose a name taken out of the religious calendar, it was expected that most of the names classified as 'free choices' were part of the liturgical calendar also, even though there was no direct correspondence between the child's birthday and the Catholic celebration. So, in the example above, *Berta* was a name that fell into the norm of Tlalnepantla in 1930. On the contrary, names like *Exquer Exquer*, also given in 1930, fell outside the norm for the period. However, it is important to point out that both names that fell inside the norm and names that fell outside the norm were considered as being part of the 'free choice' category mainly because they were not chosen in relation to any of the first names attribution models already mentioned.

## Results on First Name Attribution Models

Results concerning given name attribution in Tlalnepantla de Baz will be shown here in the following way: first, I will present results on simple models, that is when given names were chosen only because of one of the attribution models established for each cut or the 'free choice' set; afterwards, I will review the results of co-occurrence among not only given name attribution models, but the 'free choices' as well.<sup>5</sup> This was decided in order to demonstrate

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<sup>3</sup> Having had any information concerning given names of godparents it would have been possible to determine the influence these had on the selection of newborn names in the community.

<sup>4</sup> The general concept of *linguistic norm* was taken from Lara Ramos (1976 and 2009)

<sup>5</sup> A good example of the co-occurrence of first name attribution models is e.g. a boy born in 1990 who was named *José Christian* because his grandfather's name was *José*, and *Christian* was a name in fashion during that

how first name attribution models related to each other, and to try to recognize the possible ways in which onomastic preferences changed. All percentages were calculated from the samples taken for each cut and gender: for 1930 we took a sample of 258 boys and 248 girls, for 1960: 143 boys and 146 girls, and for 1990: 329 boys and 329 girls.

### Simple Models

Looking at the results on simple models, we can see that for the year of 1930 (Figures 1 and 2), there was a preference for Catholic Calendar names in relation with the child's day of birth for both boys (62%)<sup>6</sup> and girls (55%). Also, it's evident that fashion was not taken into account when choosing a name for the newborn during this year.

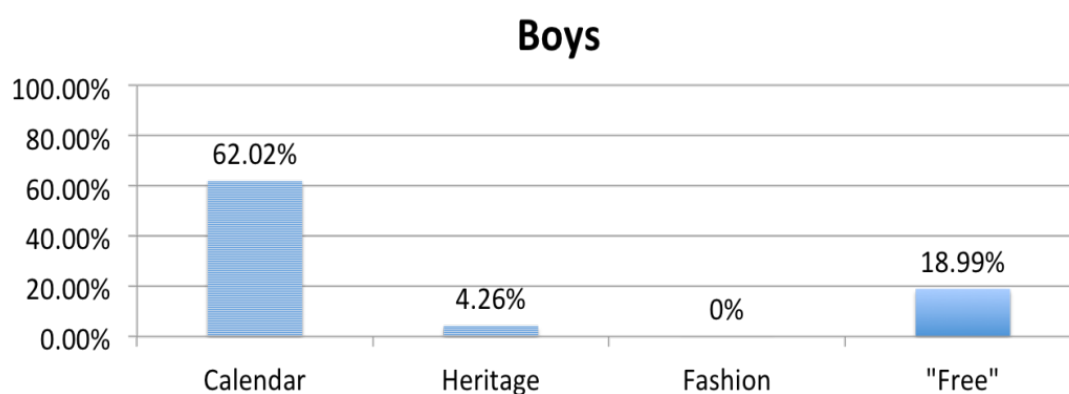


Fig. 1. Given name simple attribution models for boys, 1930

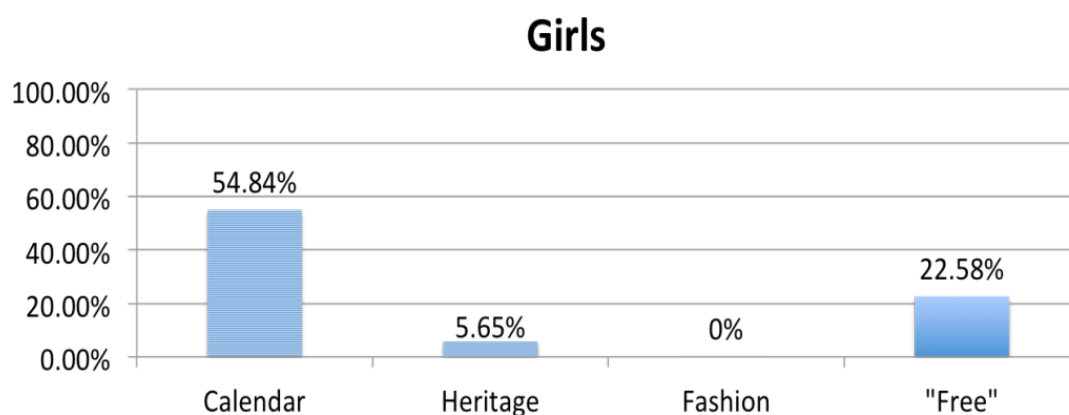


Fig. 2. Given name simple attribution models for girls, 1930

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year. Combinations could go from the co-occurrence of two models like the example just given, to the co-occurrence of all of them.

<sup>6</sup> For this part, percentages do not sum up to a hundred because they were calculated taking into consideration co-occurrences (shown below).

As shown below (Figures 3 and 4), family first names heritage increased in 1960 for boys: from 4% to 12%; conversely, it decreased for girls: from 6% to 3%. There was still a tendency towards Catholic calendar names, in spite of the fact that their percentages decreased for both boys (39%) and girls (29%). 'Free choices' increased, and fashion had no importance for male names during this synchronic cut either. Fashion starts to have a presence on female's attribution during this year: 1%.

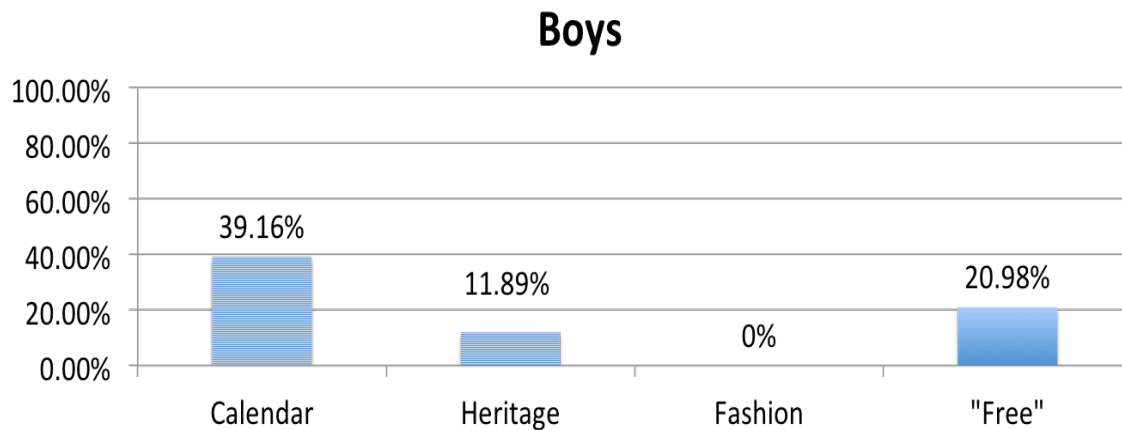


Fig. 3. Given name simple attribution models for boys, 1960

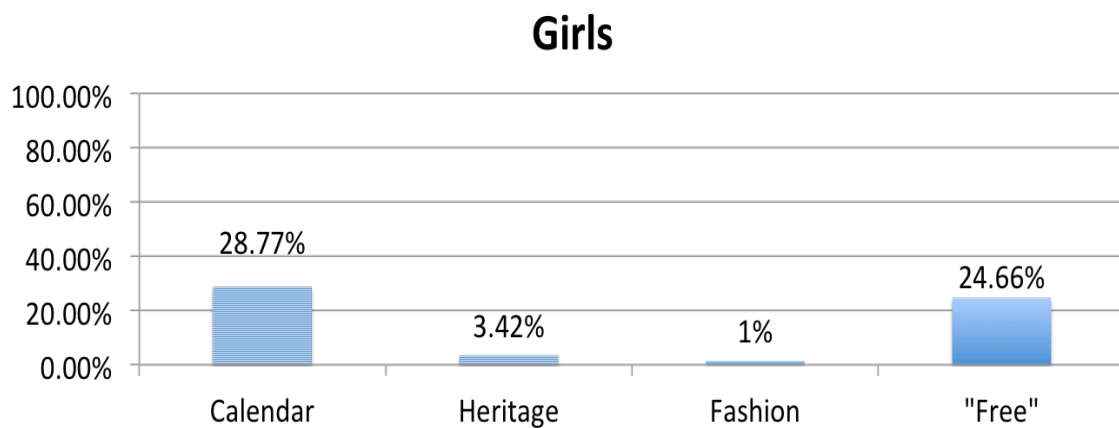


Fig. 4. Given name simple attribution models for girls, 1960

In 1990, the Catholic calendar criterion was taken into account even less frequently (see Figure 5 and Figure 6): for boys it achieved 10% and for girls, only 5%. There was a decrease in first names transmission within the same family for boys (8%) and a slight increase for girls (5%). Fashion influence for both boys and girls increased: 9% for each gender. 'Free choices' decreased also for both genders (12% for boys and 21% for girls), although they were more preferred than any simple attribution model for both boys and girls during this cut.

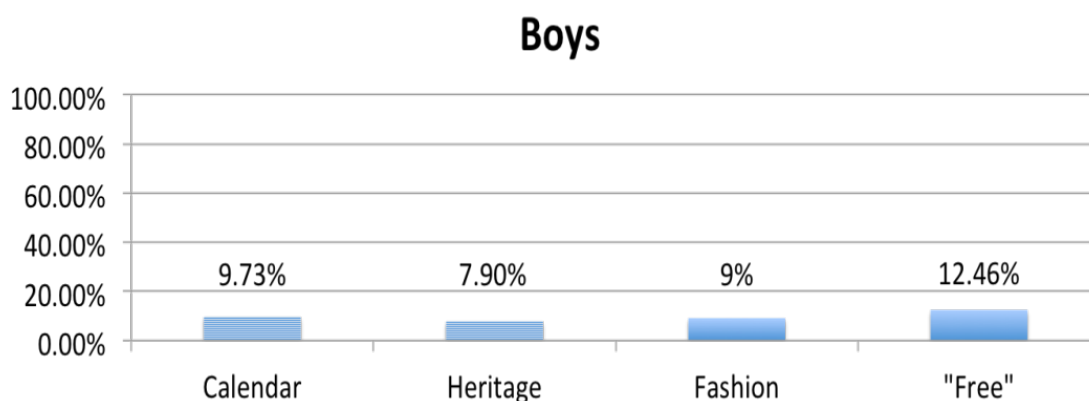


Fig. 5. Given Name Simple Attribution Models for Boys, 1990

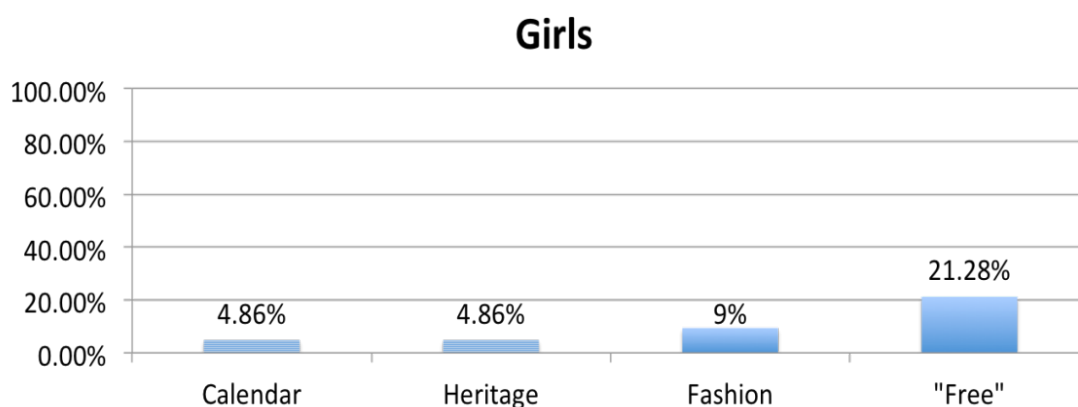


Fig. 6. Given name simple attribution models for girls, 1990

As we can see on both graphs displayed next, throughout the 20th century, the influence of the Catholic calendar decreased and, even though the family transmission of given names never obtained high percentages, it seemed to stay stable throughout the century. 'Free choices' appeared to be of more consequence during 1990 for girls than it was for boys. Finally, fashion emerged by the end of the century for boys, 30 years later than it did for girls.

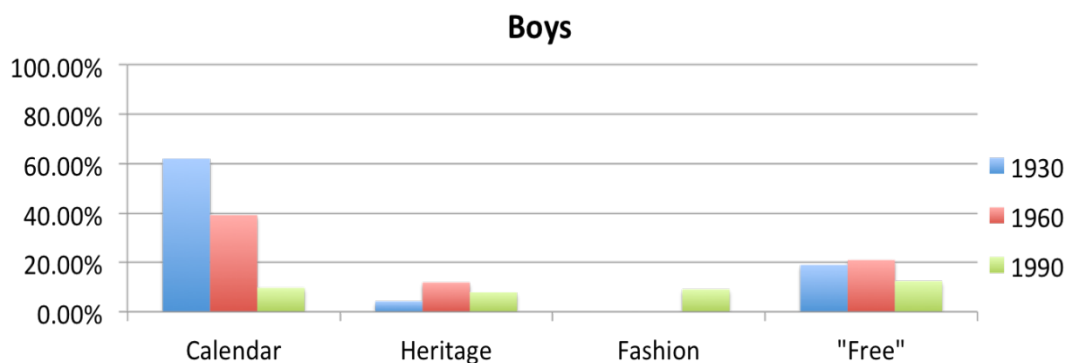


Fig. 7. Given name simple attribution models for boys throughout the period studied

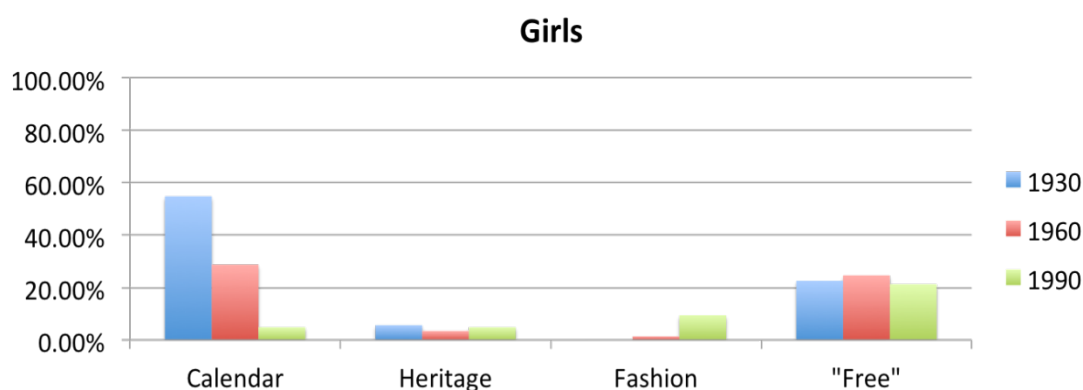


Fig. 8. Given Name Simple Attribution Models for Girls Throughout the Period Studied

### Co-occurrence of First Name Attribution Models

Information contained in charts presenting the concurrence of attribution models must be explained before going over the actual results. First, it must be said that the letters presented on pie charts stand for the following models: C for Catholic calendar, H for family heritage, Fa for fashion, and F for ‘free choices’; co-occurrences of models were written by combining the letter corresponding to each of the models so that, for example, for the coincidence of Catholic calendar influence and, let’s say, fashion, resulted in CFa. On each chart we can find not only the percentages corresponding to the co-occurrences, but also the ones pertaining to simple models just reviewed. For this part, I focused on co-occurrences since I wanted to emphasize the increasing number of combinations as the century evolved.

During 1930 there were no co-occurrences formed with the fashion-influenced model for either boys or girls. As shown in Figure 9, there were three possible combinations during this year for both genders: calendar and heritage, calendar and ‘free choice’, and the mix of all of the above; for boys, we also found heritage and ‘free choices’, a combination we did not find among female attributions.

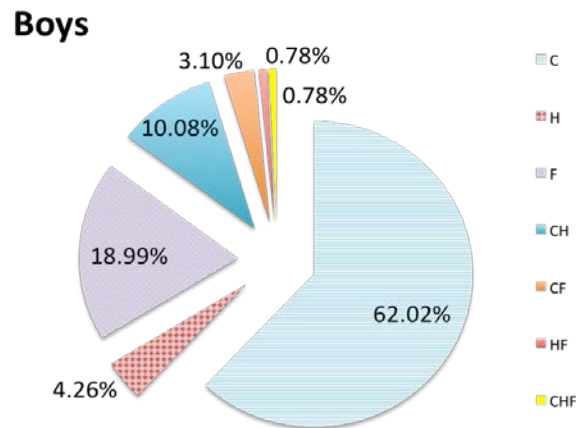


Fig. 9. Co-occurrence of Given Name Attribution Models for Boys, 1930

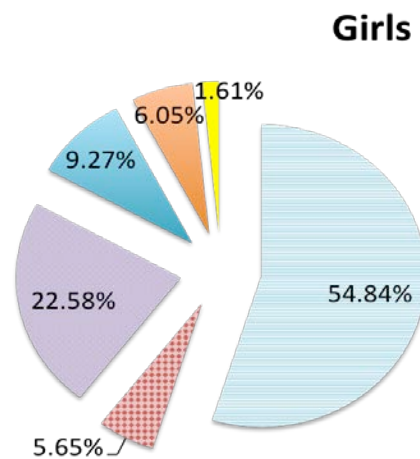


Fig. 10. Co-occurrence of given name attribution models for girls, 1930

During 1960 fashion was not present as a simple model among male names, therefore there were no combinations with names in fashion either. Possible combinations for boys were the same ones found for the last cut studied (Figure 11). For girls we found an increase on the variety of models concurrences, probably because fashion became one of the simple models active during this year (Figure 12). We found 6 models combinations, the same three ones found in 1930 plus three more: Heritage and fashion, heritage and ‘free choice’, fashion and ‘free choice’. There was no calendar and fashion combination for girls. All simple models established for Tlalnepantla as well as the ‘free choice’ set were in use for girls for this second cut studied.



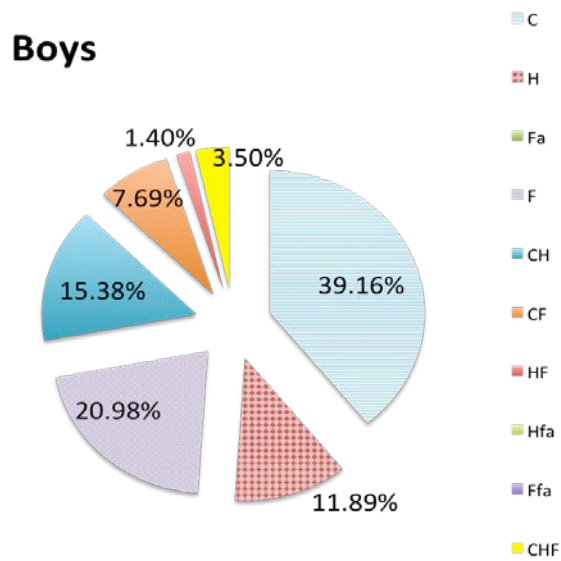


Fig. 11. Co-occurrence of given name attribution models for boys, 1960

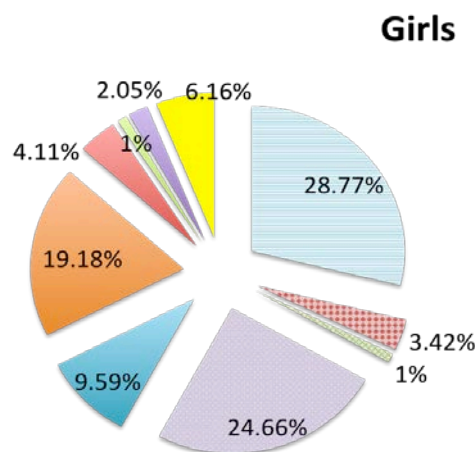


Fig. 12. Co-occurrence of Given Name Attribution Models for Girls, 1960

Evidently, there was an increase in the number of possible co-occurrences during 1990 (see Figures 13 and 14); for both boys and girls we found 11 possible combinations of simple models active for this year (percentages under 0.5% were not marked in a written way on the chart).

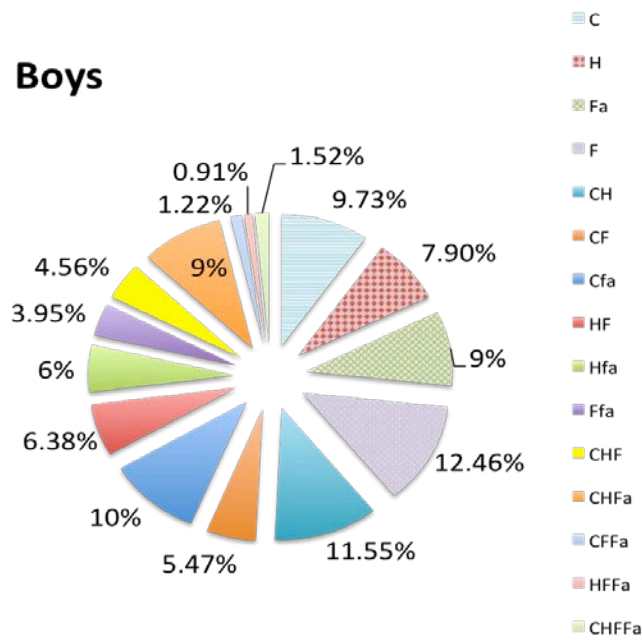


Fig. 13. Co-occurrence of given name attribution models for boys, 1990

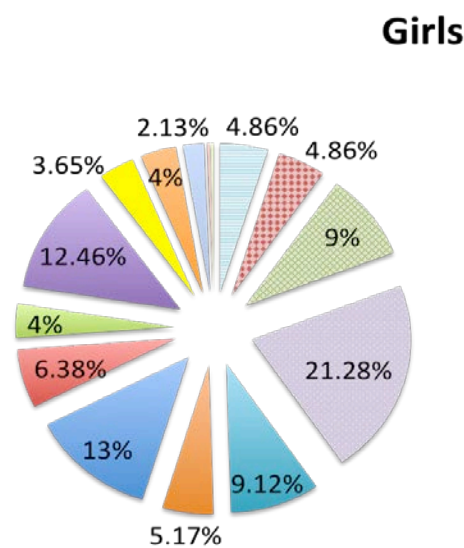


Fig. 14. Co-occurrence of given name attribution models for girls, 1990

When we take a look at the changes found in both the use of simple models and their co-occurrences, we can see that percentages in the simple models tended to decrease, probably because there were more options to choose from: not only were there more simple models active (by this I mean the more recent introduction of fashion) towards the end of the century, but also more possible combinations between models. Nevertheless, it is clear that, simple models or ‘free choices’ were the most chosen ones throughout the century (see Figures 15 and 16).

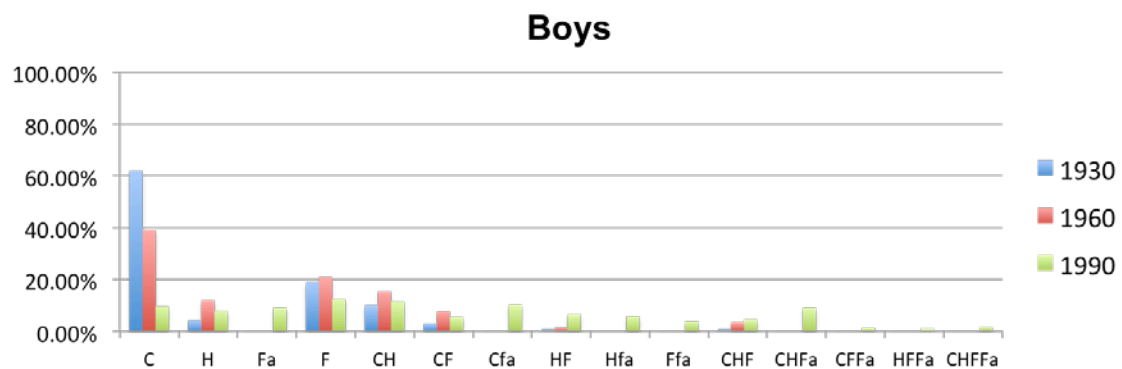


Fig. 15. Co-occurrence of given name attribution models for boys throughout the period studied

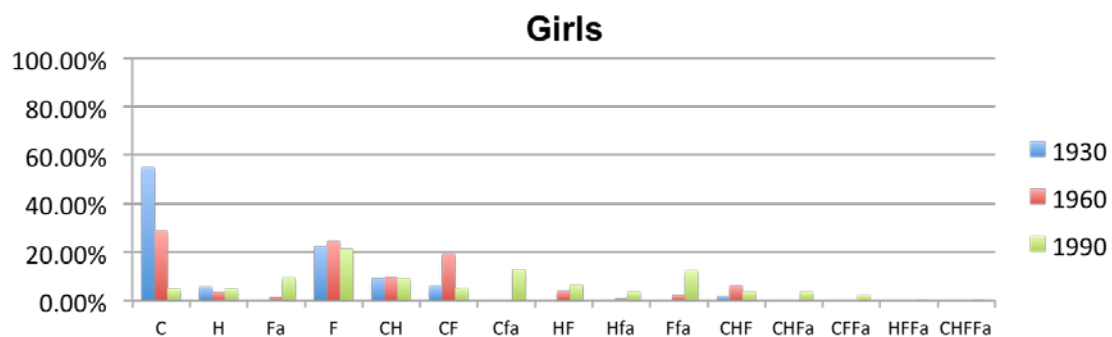


Fig. 16. Co-occurrence of given name attribution models for girls throughout the period studied

## General Tendencies

To sum up, we can say these were the general tendencies for first name attribution models in Tlalnepantla de Baz throughout the 20th century:

- Family heritage seemed to stay stable, although it never achieved high percentages for either boys or girls.
- The influence of the Catholic calendar and festivities on given names decreased as the century progressed.
- Fashion seems to become more important for both genders at the end of the century, even though it was introduced earlier for girls than it was for boys.
- Co-occurrences were made, mainly, depending on simple attribution models in use for each cut.
- Options for models combinations increased as more models became active.

## Final Words

In conclusion, we found that first name attribution models correlated to Tlalnepantla de Baz social characteristics throughout the 20th century: as people became more involved in commerce and trade professions, fashion names were selected more often. In contrast, at the beginning of the century, people living in the municipality preferred to choose names from either the Catholic calendar or family nominal heritage, in concordance with a more traditional and conservative society.

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