

WHAT DID YOU CHOOSE?

Bouba, Kiki

This is the less popular choice, with around 10% of people choosing this series of names.

Kiki, Bouba

This is the more popular choice, with around 90% of people choosing this series of names.

The relative popularity of the {Kiki, Bouba} choice over {Bouba, Kiki} has been “robustly confirmed” by many repeated studies since its discovery in 1924. It has even been found among the congenitally blind! Children as young as infants also experience similar preferences.

A Universal Preference?

The original studies that discovered this effect studied Polish, English, and Hindi speakers. Although the trends hold worldwide at varying levels, it is much weaker in certain languages, like Romanian and Mandarin. However, it is not script-dependent, appearing in languages that don't use the roman alphabet

Why?

The exact cause for this naming/labeling preference is unknown, but research has indicated that sharper mouth movements (like a “ki” can be more easily mapped to sharper shapes and harsher angles. This is similar to our concept of onomonopeia, where sounds are given associated names and spellings.

Advice for designers:

There are many points throughout the design process where you have to name or label something that is brand new, such as a logo, component, or object. This is often a difficult process, as there is little “evidence” to be used when deciding whether a name is right for a product. It's important to know that your instincts for naming things are often correct, at least for a majority of the population. Go with your gut!!



<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2020.0390>

https://web.archive.org/web/20110723035944/http://psych.mcmaster.ca/maurerlab/Publications/Maurer_bouba.pdf

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