



The Art of Naming Pokémon: Morphological Creativity in English Translation

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APA Citation:

Rongtheera, T., Chaiyasuk, T., & Rongtheera, W. (2026). The art of naming Pokémon: Morphological creativity in English translation. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 19(1), 173-197.
<https://doi.org/10.70730/YCLE6696>

Received
30/04/2025

Received in
revised form
18/09/2025

Accepted
01/10/2025

ABSTRACT

As one of the most globally popular games, Pokémon captivates players with its imaginative universe, where the names of its creatures play a critical role in gameplay. So, translating Pokémon names are considered significant for players to understand, thus enhancing the capacity of the characters they are playing. Therefore, this study investigates the morphological creativity of English Pokémon names, designed to be transparent and informative. The concepts of proper-name translation and transcreation are adopted as the study's analytical framework. A dataset of 836 Pokémon names was analysed. Ten naming strategies were identified: blending, compounding, derivation, repetition, abbreviation and initialism, clipping, borrowing, phonetic alteration, wordplay techniques, and onomatopoeia. These strategies do more than merely label the Pokémon; they provide insights into a

	<p>Pokémon’s physical traits, abilities, and types, enhancing player engagement and strategy. Blending, borrowing, and derivation dominate balancing innovation with familiarity, while less common techniques such as clipping and abbreviation may diminish name complexity. Overall, this study highlights how English Pokémon names reflect the franchise’s core values of creativity, playfulness, and cultural resonance, contributing to its enduring global success and informing broader discussions on linguistic creativity in media translation.</p> <p>Keywords: Pokémon franchise, word formation, game translation, onomastics, lexical creativity</p>
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Introduction

The word Pokémon is a contraction of “Pocket Monsters,” first introduced by Satoshi Tajiri in 1996 with the release of Pokémon Red and Green. Since then, the franchise has grown into a global phenomenon, spanning video games, animated series, movies, trading cards, and merchandise. Its enduring appeal lies in its charming, distinctive characters, which have captivated children worldwide and generated immense profits for corporations such as Hasbro, Warner Bros., and Burger King. A key factor in this success is the imaginative naming of hundreds of Pokémon species. These names highlight unique attributes—appearance, abilities, or personality (Miller, 2022; Shih et al., 2018)—and serve as more than simple labels. They encapsulate the essence of each Pokémon, blending creativity and meaning in ways that resonate across cultures and languages.

Translation is necessary because the original Japanese names, though inventive, often lack semantic transparency or cultural resonance in other languages. Effective translation re-expresses this creativity in forms that remain meaningful, aesthetically pleasing, and engaging for target audiences. Thus, translating Pokémon names is not just linguistic transfer, but an act of morphological creativity, adapting word-formation strategies to preserve both playfulness and narrative depth (Sumilang-Engracia, 2018). The following examples illustrate this process.

Table 1

Translation of Ebivalar in Different Languages

Language	Name	Meaning	Word formation strategy
Japanese	エビワラー <i>Ebivalar</i>	From Japanese boxer 海老原博幸 <i>Hiroyuki Ebihara</i>	Borrowing/Alteration with phonetic resemblance
English	Hitmonchan	From Hit, monster and <i>Jackie Chan</i>	Blending
French	Tygnon	From <i>Mike Tyson</i> and <i>gnon</i>	Blending
German	Nockchan	From <i>knock</i> and <i>Jackie Chan</i>	Compounding/Alteration with phonetic resemblance
Korean	홍수몬 <i>Hongsoomon</i>	From Korean boxer 홍수환 <i>Hong Soo-hwan</i> and <i>monster</i>	Blending

For example, the name *Ebivalar* is inspired by Hiroyuki Ebihara, a renowned Japanese boxer, which immediately signals a Fighting-type Pokémon for Japanese audiences. However, this cultural reference may not be as recognisable to international players. The challenge for localizers lies in preserving the semantic richness of such names while ensuring they remain accessible and appealing across cultures. To achieve this, translators often adapt the reference creatively, replacing it with figures familiar to the target audience. Thus, *Ebivalar* became *Hitmonchan* in English (from Jackie Chan), *Tygnon* in French (from Mike Tyson), and *Hongsoomon* in Korean (from Hong Soo-hwan), each version maintaining the essence of a Fighting-type Pokémon while aligning with local cultural knowledge.

Research on the translation of proper names or character names (charactonyms) in animated series or comics is still limited compared to studies on literary names, such as those by Embelton (1991), Delesse (2006), Mehren (2009), Balteiro (2010), and Durand Miranda and Medina Sanchez (2016). Embelton (1991) and Delesse (2006) examined the translation of both personal names and place names in the French comic series *Astérix*. Mehren (2009) focused on superhero names in Marvel's *Secret Wars* series, while Durand Miranda and Medina Sanchez (2016) investigated character names across 18 comics from both Marvel and DC Comics. However, these studies mainly emphasized translation strategies rather than word formation. In contrast, Balteiro (2010) highlighted the importance of word formation in translated names, analysing character names in the Spanish version of Marvel comics. She found that these names were created through processes such as compounding, derivation, blending, abbreviation, clipping, onomatopoeia, and borrowing from Spanish or other languages. She also noted that early Spanish translations tended to be less expressive than the English originals, even when similar word-formation techniques were applied, and that later

translations showed a decline in creative word formation, reducing their ability to capture the stylistic nuances of the English versions.

These cross-linguistic adaptations show why Pokémon naming provides a unique lens for studying morphological creativity. Unlike conventional translation, localization here requires both linguistic innovation and cultural negotiation, making word formation a key tool of adaptation. Analysing strategies such as blending, borrowing, and compounding reveals how translation and morphology intersect in shaping global media identities.

Previous research on Pokémon has focused mainly on sound symbolism (e.g., Kawahara et al., 2018; Kawahara & Kumagai, 2019; Kawahara & Moore, 2021) or wordplay (Arvidsson, 2018; Ermakova et al., 2022; Miller, 2022), but little attention has been given to systematic morphological adaptation into English. This study addresses that gap by showing how processes such as blending, compounding, clipping, and phonetic adaptation preserve meaning while enhancing accessibility and appeal. Pokémon names thus demonstrate how linguistic creativity ensures both fidelity to the source and cultural relevance in new contexts.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the lexical creativity behind English Pokémon names. By examining the morphological strategies used in translation, the study explores how language manipulation preserves key traits while adapting to the phonetic, cultural, and lexical norms of English. In doing so, it highlights the balance between creativity and cultural adaptation, offering broader insights into the challenges of translating names in cross-cultural media.

Onomastics and word formation in Pokémon

Onomastics is the study of proper names in various aspects, including naming practices across languages and cultures (Crystal, 2003). In Pokémon name translation, onomastics plays a crucial role in understanding how names identify characters and convey deeper meanings, cultural references (e.g. local mythology, food, flora, or sound symbolism), and playfulness. Pokémon names often provide multiple functions: labels, descriptors, and cultural artifacts that reflect the characteristics and lore of the creatures.

Significance of Pokémon names

In the world of Pokémon, humans coexist with hundreds of fantastical species inspired by real animals, mythological beings, and everyday objects. Each Pokémon belongs to one or more of 18 elemental “types” (e.g., Fire, Water, Electric, Grass, Fighting, Psychic), which shape its strengths,

weaknesses, and battle abilities. Players, or Trainers, capture, train, and battle Pokémon, many of which can “evolve” into more advanced forms with new powers. Because each species differs in appearance, abilities, and personality, their names are designed to reflect these distinctions.

Pokémon names capture the essence of each character, often highlighting physical traits, elemental powers, or personality features. For example, ピカチュウ (Pikachu) combines “pika” (ピカ), meaning a sparkling or crackling sound, with “chu” (チュウ), mimicking a mouse’s squeak (Shih et al., 2018), reflecting both its Electric type and mouse-like form. Similarly, カイリユウ (Kairyu) blends “kai” (カイ, sea/海) and “ryū” (リュウ, dragon/竜), underscoring its Dragon type and affinity with both sea and sky.

These carefully constructed names demonstrate the importance of onomastics in shaping Pokémon identities. They function not only as labels but also as carriers of cultural meaning and narrative depth, evoking imagery and associations essential to the franchise’s storytelling.

Translation of Pokémon names

As the Pokémon franchise expanded globally, the cultural and semantic depth embedded in Japanese names also became relevant for international audiences. Translating these names requires navigating different cultural and linguistic landscapes, ensuring resonance with target players while retaining original intent. Guided by onomastic principles, translators adapt names creatively to balance meaning, accessibility, and cultural familiarity across languages.

Research on Pokémon name translation highlights the interplay between linguistic creativity and cultural adaptation. Arvidsson (2018) shows how modulation strategies ensure cultural resonance, while Miller (2022) documents cross-linguistic variation, noting influences from analogy and folk etymology. Hernández García (2023) illustrates how Spanish localizations in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* reflect national identity but sometimes alienate Latin American audiences. Moreno García and Mangiron (2024) examine AI-driven transcreation, where tools like GPT-4 generate inventive but inconsistent adaptations. Together, these studies reveal how translation balances fidelity and adaptation, showing that Pokémon naming is a culturally embedded and commercially strategic process.

In this study, “culture” is understood on two levels. First, it refers to the linguistic culture of the target language, where phonetic and morphological conventions shape localization—for instance, retaining phonetic proximity in *Kabuto*. Second, it refers to the cultural content embedded in the game, where names encode references to Japanese mythology, martial arts, or food traditions, as seen in *Ebimalar* (from boxer

Hiroyuki Ebihara). Translation therefore requires balancing both: maintaining phonological familiarity while ensuring cultural references remain accessible to international players. This dual perspective shows how word-formation strategies mediate between language-specific conventions and the narrative culture of the franchise.

In sum, translating and adapting Pokémon names is crucial for preserving character identity, cultural references, and storytelling elements that underpin the franchise's appeal. By navigating both linguistic and cultural nuances, translators keep names engaging and relatable for diverse audiences. This process mirrors broader trends in children's literature and comics, where creative naming enhances character development and deepens audience connection.

Research Methodology

This study investigates the structure of English Pokémon names as onomastic elements, with a focus on word-formation processes such as compounding, derivation, and blending. Bauer's (1983) model of word formation was adopted as the primary coding scheme because it emphasises morphological productivity and accounts for sociolinguistic influences relevant to Pokémon translation. Each English name was classified under a dominant morphological category (e.g., blending, compounding, clipping), with ambiguous cases resolved using reputable fan wikis (Bulbapedia, Pokemondb.net, Serebii.net) cross-checked against official sources and standard dictionaries in English, French, and Japanese.

Balteiro's (2010) framework on the translation of Marvel comic book characteronyms was used to interpret how word-formation processes contribute to character identity and narrative engagement. Her emphasis on morphological creativity and cross-linguistic adaptation provided insights into the expressive and cultural potential of Pokémon names. For example, *Ebivalar* → *Hitmonchan* was coded as blending under Bauer's model but, through Balteiro's lens, interpreted as a cultural adaptation that replaced a Japan-specific reference with a globally recognisable martial arts figure.

Together, these models enabled a two-stage analysis: first, systematic classification of word-formation processes; second, interpretation of their cultural and translational functions. Cultural aspects embedded in Pokémon names were examined using authoritative resources, including the official Pokémon database, Pokédex entries, Bulbapedia etymologies, and scholarly discussions on Japanese mythology, food, and popular culture. This approach traced how cultural references in Japanese originals (e.g., samurai helmets,

martial arts icons, sound symbolism) were preserved, adapted, or replaced in English.

Examples of the analysis include: *Bulbasaur* categorised as a blend (bulb + dinosaur), encoding physical form and evolutionary theme; *Kabuto* as borrowing, directly preserving the cultural reference to a samurai helmet; and *Hypno* as clipping from “hypnosis,” still signalling its Psychic-type powers. In each case, Bauer’s typology guided classification, while Balteiro’s framework explained how meaning and cultural resonance were mediated for global audiences.

When analysing a single name, four steps were followed: (1) matching the English form with its Japanese counterpart and etymons using official sources; (2) identifying the dominant word-formation process (and secondary ones) under Bauer’s typology; (3) annotating expressive and cultural functions via Balteiro’s framework; and (4) evaluating how the English form balanced semantic transparency with cultural accessibility. Results were then tabulated for quantitative comparison.

For data collection, English Pokémon names were sourced from Pokémon GO, a globally popular mobile game since 2016. The dataset includes 836 names listed in the Pokédex as of late 2022, with *Annihilape* as the most recent entry. This set represents about 82% of the 1,025 species in the National Pokédex, providing a robust foundation for analysing naming conventions. For cultural and translational analysis, each English name was cross-referenced with its Japanese counterpart to trace cultural references, phonetic features, and semantic nuances. Only official Japanese–English pairs were used, while fan translations and unofficial variants were excluded. Frequency counts and percentages were then calculated to assess the relative productivity of each word-formation process.

Results

According to the 836 English Pokémon names, ten word-formation strategies are used. Most of these strategies are transparent and easily understood by the English-speaking audience. Some names retain their original Japanese etymology, while others are newly created. The frequency and percentage of each process are summarised in the following table:

Table 2

Frequency and Distribution of Word-Formation Processes in English Pokémon Names

Word-formation process	Occurrence	Percentage
1. Blending	554	66.27
2. Borrowing	158	18.90
3. Compounding	47	5.62
4. Phonetic alteration	30	3.59
5. Derivation	29	3.47
6. Clipping	7	0.84
7. Repetition	3	0.36
8. Abbreviation and initialism	3	0.36
9. Wordplay techniques	3	0.36
10. Onomatopoeia	2	0.24
	836	100.00

Blending

In Pokémon name translation, blending is one of the most common morphological strategies used. This technique combines two or more words into a single unit by truncating parts of the original words or overlapping segments. Typically, the components of a blend share similar phonological or graphical features.

Many Pokémon English names are created through blending, combining words to reflect certain traits of the Pokémon, such as their type, appearance, or abilities. As discussed in the literature, Pokémon are categorized into 18 different types. Our analysis shows that blending in name formation often encodes these elemental categories, with Fire-type Pokémon frequently incorporating words like *blaze* or *inferno*:

1. **Blaziken** (*blaze* + *chicken*)
2. **Infernape** (*inferno* + *ape*)

In *Blaziken*, *blaze* signifies its fire-based abilities, while *chicken* indicates it resembles a bird, specifically a chicken. Similarly, *Infernape* combines *inferno*, a word linked to fire, with *ape*, signifying its fiery powers and simian appearance. These blends provide immediate clues about the Pokémon's type and characteristics.

Additionally, Pokémon often evolve, undergoing physical changes and gaining new abilities. In their evolved forms, part of the original name is frequently retained to maintain continuity. This is achieved by repeating word components that reflect key traits:

3. **Psyduck** (*Psychic* + *duck*)
4. **Golduck** (*Gold* + *duck*)

In *Psyduck* and *Golduck*, *duck* emphasizes their duck-like appearance. While *Psyduck* suggests psychic abilities, *Golduck* adds *gold*, referring to its more mature form.

In some evolutionary lines, only partial components of the name are retained:

5. **Gible** (*gargoyle* + *nibble*)
6. **Gabite** (*gargoyle* + *bite*)
7. **Garchomp** (*gargoyle* + *chomp*)

In these examples, all three names share the *gargoyle* component, though it appears differently in each stage: *Gible* has only one letter (*G*), *Gabite* has two letters (*Ga*), and *Garchomp* uses three letters (*Gar*). The second components (*nibble*, *bite*, and *chomp*) highlight the Pokémon's evolving biting abilities.

Notably, blending can also incorporate proper names to emphasise specific traits. For example:

8. **Hitmonlee** (*Hit* + *mon* + *Lee*)
9. **Hitmonchan** (*Hit* + *mon* + *Chan*)

Both names feature *hit*, representing striking, and *mon*, a shortened form of *monster* or *Pokémon*. The names *Lee* and *Chan* are derived from Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, reflecting their distinct martial arts styles.

Mythological names also appear in blends, such as:

10. **Larvesta** (*larva* + *Vesta*)
11. **Tornadus** (*tornado* + *Aeolus*)

Larvesta combines *larva*, referencing its bug form, with *Vesta*, the Roman goddess of fire, symbolizing its Fire-type abilities. *Tornadus* blends *tornado* with *Aeolus*, the Greek god of winds, emphasizing its control over wind and storms.

In some cases, the second element is integrated into the middle of the word rather than following the first element:

12. **Deino** (*dino* + *ein*)
13. **Fraxure** (*fracture* + *axe*)

Deino blends *dino* (dinosaur) with *ein* (German for “one”), suggesting that this Pokémon represents the first stage of its evolutionary line. In *Fraxure*,

axe is inserted into *fracture*, symbolizing its axe-like tusks and its ability to break things.

Blending in Pokémon names is a creative and effective word-formation strategy that makes names both accessible and memorable for players. By combining familiar words, creators craft names that offer clear hints about the Pokémon's traits, aiding in understanding and recall. This approach strengthens the connection between the name and the Pokémon's identity, enhancing the overall experience for players. Additionally, blending enables creators to craft descriptive yet concise names, even with character limits, by merging elements that capture multiple traits. This strategy helps reflect the Pokémon's type, abilities, or evolution in a compact way, which is crucial for naming hundreds of unique characters in the Pokémon universe.

Borrowing

Borrowing is a simple translation strategy where a word is directly inserted into the target language without translation. In terms of word formation in English Pokémon names, this procedure is divided into two parts. The first one concerns this translation strategy without creating a new word. On the other hand, the second involves a new word formation but inspired by foreign words that differs from the original name.

Borrowing Japanese names

Although Niantic, an American company, developed Pokémon GO, the franchise's Japanese origins make the preservation of cultural elements inevitable. Borrowing, where the target text retains the same word as the source, helps maintain this cultural flavour. Two types of names fall under this approach.

The first group includes names derived from Japanese words, such as *Pikachu*, *Nidoran*, and *Kabuto*. These are often preserved because, even if their meanings are not fully transparent, they retain their charm and uniqueness. *Pikachu*, for example, remains untranslated across languages (Pixiv Encyclopedia, n.d.), ensuring global recognition and marketability across media. Some names also draw directly on Japanese mythology and traditions—*Kabuto*, referencing the samurai helmet, exemplifies this cultural link. Translating such names would weaken their significance, making borrowing the most effective strategy.

The second group includes names inspired by English words. Although still considered borrowings, these undergo phonological adaptation

to fit Japanese. Examples include Delibird and Unown, whose forms show the influence of Japanese phonetics while preserving their English roots.

Table 3

Etymological Origins of Pokémon Names: Japanese and English Comparison

Japanese names	Origin	English names
<i>Deribado</i>	delivery + bird	<i>Delibird</i>
<i>Annon</i>	un + known	<i>Unown</i>

As shown in Table 3, *Deribado* comes from a blend of “delivery” and “bird.” Due to the limitations of the Japanese sound system, the English /r/ is replaced by /l/, and the word “bird” is adapted into two open syllables. Similarly, *Annon* plays on the word “unknown”, suggesting something mysterious or not identified. In English, the name *Unown* retains the original Japanese form but alters the spelling of “unknown” to create a distinct and recognizable name.

In these cases, called naturalised borrowing, the phonological adaptation required for Japanese borrowings from English (like adding vowels to separate consonants) demonstrates the challenges in maintaining phonetic integrity while preserving meaning. Yet, borrowing allows these names to still connect with their original concepts.

Borrowing of foreign words

In contrast to the direct borrowing of Japanese names, where English names remain identical to their Japanese counterparts, this technique involves creating new English names by borrowing words from other languages. Rather than preserving the original name phonetically, English names are crafted with foreign words that highlight specific traits. See examples 14 and 15 below.

14. **Gardevoir:** French words *garde* (guard) + *voir* (to see) or *devoir* (duty)
15. **Makuhita:** Derived from Japanese terminology related to sumo wrestling

Gardevoir combines the French words *garde* and *voir*, suggesting a Pokémon with protective instincts and psychic abilities. Alternatively, it could blend *garde* with *devoir*, underscoring a sense of duty. This name emphasizes Gardevoir’s role as a loyal, guardian-like Pokémon. *Makuhita*, on the other

hand, draws from sumo, a traditional Japanese sport. The name refers to a sumo wrestler's strength and endurance which align with the Pokémon's strong built and Fighting-type characteristics.

In conclusion, borrowing in Pokémon name translation serves to preserve cultural and linguistic authenticity while enhancing the global appeal of the franchise. Whether through the direct retention of Japanese names, such as *Pikachu* and *Kabuto*, or the adaptation of English words to fit the phonological structures of Japanese, borrowing maintains the connection to the original concepts and cultural nuances. Furthermore, the strategic use of foreign words, like in the names *Gardevoir* and *Makuhita*, illustrates how borrowing can also introduce new layers of meaning while reflecting the Pokémon's characteristics. Overall, borrowing ensures that the names resonate across different cultures, offering both recognition and relatability to players worldwide.

Compounding

Compounding is a word formation process where two or more complete words are combined to create a new name. Unlike blending, which merges parts of words, compounding retains the original words largely intact. Most compound names in Pokémon are examples of closed compounds, where the words are joined together without spaces or punctuation. These compound names typically highlight the characteristics, appearance, or types of the Pokémon. Some prominent examples include:

16. **Seaking** (sea + king)
17. **Sandshrew** (sand + shrew)

In *Seaking*, the combination of “sea” and “king” suggests a regal figure ruling over aquatic environments, which aligns with its Water-type classification. Similarly, *Sandshrew* combines “sand” (its habitat) with “shrew” (the creature it resembles), signifying its Ground-type characteristics and affinity for sandy areas. The integrity of both components in these compound names helps to clearly communicate each Pokémon's traits and types.

Furthermore, a series of Spanish words is borrowed to create Pokémon names in English:

18. **Articuno** (Arctic + uno)
19. **Zapdos** (zap + dos)
20. **Moltres** (molten + tres)

The first elements identify the type of the Pokémon: “Arctic” (from the Arctic) refers to Ice-type, “Zap” denotes Electric-type, and “Mol(ten)” corresponds to Fire-type. The last components represent the numbers one to three in Spanish. These three names, part of the legendary Pokémon¹ trio, exemplify compounding in Pokémon naming conventions.

Additionally, there are also open compounds, where the words are written separately but still function as a single unit. Two types of open compounds can be identified in Pokémon names:

- **Titles:** In examples like *Mr. Mime* (Mr. + Mime) and *Mime Jr.* (Mime + Jr.), the elements “Mr.” and “Jr.” imply a connection between the two Pokémon, with *Mime Jr.* representing a younger form that can evolve into *Mr. Mime*.
- **Foreign Words:** Pokémon names may also borrow from other languages, creating compounds with cultural significance. For instance, *Tapu Koko* and *Tapu Bulu* are Legendary Pokémon from the Alola region, a tropical archipelago inspired by Hawaii. The word “Tapu” means ‘holy’ in Hawaiian, while “Koko” refers to ‘a rooster’s crowing’ and “Bulu” means ‘bull’ (<https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net>). These names emphasize their sacred status in the Alola region’s lore.

It’s also worth noting that, in some cases, elements of a compound word may undergo slight modifications for smoother pronunciation. For example, *Lickitung* (lick + tongue) represents a Pokémon known for its long tongue and its habit of licking. The slight alteration in the spelling of “tongue” creates a more fluid and natural-sounding name while retaining the meaning.

Compounding is a significant phenomenon in both the Pokémon universe and broader linguistic contexts. It is one of the most widespread word formation processes across many languages, enabling creative naming conventions that reflect cultural influences. In the Pokémon names, this is evident through the combination of English, Spanish, and Hawaiian elements, which contribute to a rich narrative and character design that resonates with players worldwide. The use of compounding not only conveys essential traits, origins, and characteristics of the Pokémon but also enriches the thematic coherence of the franchise. By employing this strategy, the names establish an identifiable pattern and strengthen the connection between the Pokémon’s identity and the lore of the Pokémon world.

Alteration with phonetic resemblance

Some Pokémon names are not fully borrowed from English or foreign words but are creatively modified with playful orthographic changes. This technique often reflects the Pokémon's appearance or traits, as shown in the following examples: *Seel* (from *seal*) and *Timburr* (from *timber*). *Seel* is a homophone of *seal*, directly suggesting this Water-type Pokémon's resemblance to the aquatic mammal. In *Timburr*, derived from *timber*, the name playfully hints at this Fighting-type Pokémon's use of a timber beam as its weapon, although it does not imply a wood-type connection.

Additionally, some names adopt orthographic modifications that include a final syllable, softening the name and making it more memorable: *Chansey* (from *chance*) and *Swanna* (from *swan*).

In *Chansey*, the connection to *chance* reflects its role as a benevolent, luck-bringing Pokémon often found in Pokémon Centers. The ending sound /-i/ evokes friendliness, aligning with its role as a caregiver. Similarly, *Swanna* incorporates the grace associated with a swan, while the added /-a/ imparts a sense of elegance, reinforcing its refined, graceful appearance.

These phonetic and orthographic alterations in Pokémon names not only add uniqueness but also evoke personality traits or visual associations, making each Pokémon's name memorable and reflective of its in-game role or appearance.

Derivation

Derivation is a widely used method of word formation that involves modifying a base word by adding prefixes or suffixes to create new words with related meanings. This technique is prevalent in everyday language and also plays a significant role in the Pokémon universe, where it is used to convey specific attributes and evolutionary stages of Pokémon. Most of cases are derivate by suffix such -er, -ett, -lith:

21. **Grimer**: grim + -er
22. **Ducklet**: duck + -lett
23. **Gigalith**: giga + -lith

These examples can imply that *Grimer* concerns a sludge Pokémon whereas *Ducklett* may a small duck-appearance. *Gigalith* present a huge rock-type Pokémon.

Dinosaur-like Pokémon names also follow dinosaur naming conventions, often using common suffixes like “-don,” as seen in *Shieldon* (Shield + don). This name suggests a dinosaur-like Pokémon characterized by its shield-like features.

In case of prefix, there are only two Pokémon names as illustrated below:

- 24. **Sudowoodo**: pseudo + wood
- 25. **Ambipom**: ambi + palm

In example 24, *Sudowoodo* is interpreted that its appearance looks like wood but it is not because of the prefix *pseudo-*. This form of this prefix is modified in order to an easy pronunciation. *Ambipom* formed by *ambi-* (both) and palm represents that this Pokémon has two palms. Actually, two palms are here two tails in the form of a palm.

In the case of *Eevee*'s evolutions, derivation is exemplified by the use of the suffix *-eon*. This suffix is systematically added to different base words to form the names of *Eevee*'s evolved forms, each reflecting a unique elemental type. Here are some examples:

- 26. **Vaporeon**: vapor + -eon
- 27. **Leafeon**: leaf + -eon
- 28. **Glaceon**: glace + -eon

The use of *-eon* as a suffix serves a dual purpose. It maintains continuity and consistency within the Pokémon universe by signalling that these Pokémon are evolutions of *Eevee*. Simultaneously, the base words (*vapor*, *leaf*, *glace*) provide clear indications of the Pokémon's elemental type. For instance, *vapor* suggests that *Vaporeon* is a Water-type Pokémon, characterized by its aquatic nature, while *leaf* indicates that *Leafeon* is a Grass-type Pokémon, known for its botanical attributes. Finally, *glace* highlights *Glaceon*'s Ice-type nature, reflecting its icy characteristics.

By employing derivation in this manner, the Pokémon names not only preserve a recognizable evolutionary pattern but also effectively communicate the elemental traits of each Pokémon, enriching the thematic coherence of the Pokémon series.

Clipping

Clipping is a technique that involves shortening a word by removing part of it, usually at the beginning or end, to create a simpler form. Examples of Pokémon names that use this method include *Hypno* and *Pineco*. *Hypno* is clipped from “hypnosis,” which reflects its identity as a Psychic-type Pokémon with hypnotic powers. Similarly, *Pineco* comes from “pinecone,” hinting at its appearance, which resembles a pinecone.

Interestingly, two Pokémon names—*Abra* and *Kadabra*—are derived from the same word, “abracadabra,” a well-known magic word. *Abra* is formed by removing the last three syllables, while *Kadabra* drops the first two. This clever use of clipping connects both names to the same evolutionary line, highlighting their shared classification as Psychic-type. Pokémon. *Abra* represents the initial stage in this line and can evolve into the more advanced, psychic-powered stages.

Through these clipped names, the essence of each Pokémon is captured in a simple, memorable way, demonstrating how the process of clipping can effectively convey unique characteristics with minimal alteration.

Repetition

Repetition in Pokémon naming involves combining two elements with the same or similar meanings, enhancing the character’s standout traits in a playful, memorable way. Although this technique is rarely used in English Pokémon names, here are some notable examples:

29. **Klefki**: “klef” (adapted from the French *clef*) + “ki” (representing *key*).
30. **Lickilicky**: “licky” + “licky.”

In *Klefki*, the French word *clef*, meaning ‘key’, pairs with its English equivalent, *key*, which appears as “ki” in a phonetic variation. This repetition of “key” emphasizes the Pokémon’s key-like appearance and its affinity for collecting keys. *Lickilicky* doubles the word *licky*, emphasizing the Pokémon’s defining feature: its large, active tongue, often used for exploring its environment. Here, repetition highlights its humorous, exaggerated qualities, underscoring the playful nature of Pokémon that rely on such distinctive traits.

Compared to other naming techniques like blending, repetition directly reinforces a singular characteristic without introducing entirely new elements, keeping the name straightforward yet impactful. This technique, though less common, provides a memorable effect and works particularly well for Pokémon whose defining feature is central to their identity.

Abbreviation and initialism

Abbreviation involves creating a shortened form of a word. In English Pokémon names, this technique is relatively rare, but a notable example is *Eevee*, derived from the word ‘evolution’, EV. This name highlights

Eevee's unique trait—its ability to evolve into multiple forms across various types.

Initialism, on the other hand, is an abbreviation formed by using the initial letters of constituent words, pronounced separately. In Pokémon GO, only two Pokémon names are created using this method: *Elgyem* and *Bebeeyem*. However, their names deviate from the typical definition of initialism, as they are based on pronounced forms with slight alterations rather than merely being the initials of constituent words.

According to Species (n.d.), *Elgyem* is derived from LGM, which stands for “little green men,” a common term for extraterrestrial beings in popular culture, especially in B-movies. Similarly, *Bebeeyem* comes from BEM, which stands for “bug-eyed monsters,” another trope associated with alien lifeforms in sci-fi media. These abbreviations are frequently used to describe extraterrestrials in fiction, linking both Pokémon to alien-inspired themes.

The use of initialism in these Pokémon names demonstrates a strong combination of linguistic creativity and thematic relevance. Rather than simply abbreviating common terms, the initials are adapted to represent extraterrestrial concepts, making the names feel more natural within the context of the Pokémon world. This method enhances the connection between the names and the Pokémon’s psychic abilities, reinforcing their ties to themes of alien intelligence and the supernatural. By slightly altering the original acronyms, the names not only capture the essence of well-known sci-fi references but also become more distinctive and memorable for players.

Wordplay techniques

This category includes playful manipulations of spelling and letter arrangement to create distinct Pokémon names. Techniques such as backward spelling, palindromes, and metathesis are rare but add a layer of linguistic creativity that makes these names memorable and engaging.

Backward Spelling: Some Pokémon names are created by reversing letters in a word. For example, *Ekans* is derived from “snake” spelled backward. This name emphasizes the serpent-like qualities of this poison-type Pokémon while introducing an unusual twist that adds an element of surprise.

Palindrome: A palindrome reads the same forwards and backwards, creating symmetry in the name. *Girafarig*, derived from “giraffe,” exemplifies this technique. The name not only hints at its appearance but also symbolizes the unique, two-headed design of this Pokémon. The palindrome format aligns with its balanced, dual nature.

Metathesis (Reordering): Metathesis involves rearranging letters within a word to form a new one. In the case of *Beldum*, letters from

“dumbbell” are reordered to create a name that reflects its Steel-type power and its resemblance to a weight.

These techniques are also employed in Japanese names and creatively adapted in English. Notable examples include *Arbok* and *Rotom*. *Arbok* is formed by backward spelling from “cobra,” marking the evolved stage in Ekans’ evolutionary line. Interestingly, in Japanese, *Ekans* is called *Arbo*, derived from “boa,” though the word “snake” was preferred in English. *Rotom*, meanwhile, is rearranged from “motor,” highlighting its Electric-type power and its ability to possess various electronic appliances.

Through these diverse wordplay techniques, each name gains an element of creativity, reinforcing distinctive Pokémon traits and demonstrating how even simple letter arrangements can enhance meaning and memorability.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia involves the use of sound imitation to represent the characteristics of a Pokémon. A clear example of this process can be seen in the names *Klink* and *Klang*. *Klink* mimics the sharp, light sound of two metal pieces striking each other, while *Klang* evokes a louder, more resonant metallic noise. These names are designed to replicate the auditory sensation of clinking and clanging, reflecting the Steel-type characteristics of the Pokémon. This strategy highlights key traits and creates playful, sound-based associations that enhance their appeal across languages.

In contrast, the Japanese names of these Pokémon do not rely on direct sound imitation but rather use sound alterations of the word “gear”: ギアル (*giaru*) for *Klink* and ギギアル (*gigiaru*) for *Klang*. Despite the different linguistic approach, the Japanese names still evoke associations with metallic objects, maintaining consistency with the Pokémon's mechanical design and type.

The morphological analysis of English Pokémon names reveals the intricate linguistic creativity used to identify Pokémon, enriched by narrative and cultural elements. Employing diverse word formation strategies, these names exemplify the dynamic interplay between language and identity. This creative naming not only enhances players’ familiarity with the characters but also fosters deeper engagement within the Pokémon universe.

Conclusion and discussion

The translation of Pokémon names from Japanese to English involves not only linguistic complexity but also cultural contexts and the unique characteristics of each Pokémon. Translators must deal with these challenges by employing various word formation processes to create names that are engaging, descriptive, and culturally resonant. This section presents key conclusions and discussions on the morphological creativity and challenges observed in the translation of Pokémon names.

Based on the analysis of 836 Pokémon names translated into English, ten distinct word formation strategies have been identified to convey the Pokémon's powers, characteristics, and narrative roles. These strategies include blending, compounding, derivation, repetition, abbreviation and initialism, clipping, borrowing, phonetic alteration, wordplay techniques, and onomatopoeia.

Blending is the most prominent strategy in English Pokémon naming conventions, skilfully combining elements to suggest the Pokémon's type, traits, and appearance. This technique requires a delicate balance to maintain clarity. Translators need sufficient encyclopedic knowledge and the ability to incorporate references into Pokémon names, drawing from iconic figures (e.g., Bruce Lee), mythology (e.g., Vesta), and dinosaur naming conventions. Unlike other fantasy genres such as *Fantastic Beasts* or *Marvel Comics*, where blending is rare (Balteiro, 2010; Liendo, 2019; Nováková, 2015), Pokémon employs this strategy extensively to craft descriptive and captivating names.

In contrast, Japanese names often rely on sound symbolism to convey specific traits or characteristics (Kawahara et al., 2018), as seen in names like *Pikachu*. Many English names, however, preserve a more descriptive, semantic focus, with blending playing a key role in highlighting the Pokémon's identity, as exemplified by *Psyduck*. This contrast underscores the different ways blending and sound symbolism are used to convey meaning across languages.

Borrowing is a key strategy for maintaining the authenticity of Pokémon identities across languages. Names like *Pikachu*, borrowed directly from Japanese, preserve phonetic integrity and cultural essence, helping the character retain global recognition. Yet borrowed names may be opaque to players unfamiliar with Japanese, unlike localized names shaped through creative adaptation. For example, *Gardevoir* draws from other languages, broadening global appeal while staying descriptive.

In contrast to comic translations, where charactonyms are often retained for consistency (e.g., Spider-Man, Iron Man) (Végh, 2018), Pokémon operates in an interactive environment. Here, borrowing ensures authenticity

and recognition, while blending or compounding often enhances player understanding of traits. Such adaptations align names with cultural and linguistic expectations, making them more engaging. This balance shows how borrowing in Pokémon works alongside other strategies to preserve authenticity while adapting to diverse audiences.

Compounding, like blending, can represent a Pokémon's appearance, type, or abilities. It is often easier to interpret because it joins two or more meaningful elements, making the link to a Pokémon's identity explicit. This technique allows players—especially younger ones or those less familiar with linguistic creativity—to recognise traits quickly without complex decoding. Although less frequent than blending, compounding remains effective, offering straightforward, descriptive names that help players connect with the characters more immediately.

Instead of using direct, familiar words, Pokémon naming sometimes employs phonetic alteration—creatively modifying sounds or spellings to make names more memorable, playful, and distinct. This gives them a whimsical quality that fits the imaginative world of Pokémon while still hinting at traits such as strength, cuteness, or speed. However, compared to strategies like blending or borrowing, phonetic alteration is used less frequently in media naming practices (Balteiro, 2010).

In contrast to general English word formation, where neologisms often emerge through derivation (Szymanek, 2005), Pokémon names rely on it minimally—only 3.47% of the dataset. Prefixation and suffixation offer limited clarity, whereas blending dominates by providing immediate transparency and recognisability. Blending more effectively captures appearance, type, or abilities, making it the preferred strategy for creating evocative, accessible names.

While blending, borrowing, and compounding dominate Pokémon name formation, less common processes—clipping, repetition, abbreviation/initialism, wordplay, and onomatopoeia—appear rarely. Their limited use reflects concerns about clarity, memorability, and expressive potential.

Clipping, the shortening of words by removing syllables, is seldom employed because it often reduces descriptive richness. Pokémon names must both engage players and convey traits, type, or abilities. Unlike blending or compounding, clipping can obscure meaning. *Hypno* (from “hypnosis”) works by signalling psychic powers, but broader use of clipping risks producing names that are too vague.

Repetition, abbreviation/initialism, and wordplay each occur in only three names (0.36%), giving them distinct but minor roles. Repetition playfully amplifies traits, as in *Lickilicky*, where doubling “licky” highlights its tongue and adds a catchy rhythm. Abbreviation offers concise references to

broader concepts, as seen in *Elgyem* and *Beheeyem*, derived from LGM (little green men) and BEM (bug-eyed monsters), evoking mystery and intertextual associations.

Wordplay techniques—such as backward spelling, palindromes, or metathesis—inject creative twists into names. For instance, forming *Ekans* from “snake” by reversing the letters creates an unexpected linguistic flip that boosts memorability. Their infrequent use may stem from the challenge of balancing creative ingenuity with clarity.

In summary, while these strategies are used less frequently, they are deliberately employed to produce unique, meaningful names that resonate with players and contribute effectively to the Pokémon universe’s narrative and branding.

In contrast to these strategies—which focus on reinforcing intrinsic characteristics and creating compact, evocative forms—onomatopoeia, despite its potential to produce vivid auditory associations, is employed relatively sparingly in English Pokémon names. This is likely due to its limited ability to convey concrete descriptive information. Unlike in Japanese, where sound symbolism plays a significant role in naming (e.g., *Pikachu* from “pika” ‘spark’ and “chu” ‘mouse squeak’), English names tend to favour lexical transparency. Onomatopoeic names such as *Klink* and *Klang* (which imitate the sounds of metal striking) work well because they reflect the Pokémon’s Steel-type characteristics. However, if overused, onomatopoeia might result in names that are more abstract and less effective at conveying a Pokémon’s abilities or personality.

The limited use of these strategies suggests that Pokémon name formation prioritizes a balance between creativity and comprehensibility. Blending, borrowing, and compounding offer a higher degree of expressiveness and recognizability, making them more suitable for crafting memorable and intuitive names in the franchise. This observation is particularly relevant in the case of Pokémon, where English often functions as the default naming language across multiple regions. Developers frequently adopt English as a global medium to ensure that players can engage with the game easily, regardless of their first language. In many areas, Pokémon names are first translated from Japanese into English, and these English names are then adopted in regions without further localization. This practice is motivated by both marketing and accessibility considerations: English names have become globally recognisable, reinforcing brand consistency while also serving as a widely understood second language. As a result, the use of English names is generally unproblematic for local audiences. Examples include Latin American countries where most Pokémon names remain in English despite partial Spanish translations (Hernández García, 2023).

This study highlights the intersection of linguistics and game design, showing how language strengthens Pokémon's cultural resonance. Its naming conventions illustrate the blend of linguistic creativity and cross-cultural adaptation, making the research relevant to both translation and onomastics. Beyond language, Pokémon's global popularity reflects broader cultural and social dynamics. Tobin (2004) notes that its complex systems of characters, rarity, and trading have fuelled both fascination and concerns—ranging from competition and exclusion to fostering friendships among children worldwide. By reflecting values such as consumerism and competitiveness, Pokémon naming embodies linguistic creativity while resonating with deeper social patterns, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive translation (Chua-Eoan & Larimer, 1999). Future research could compare how names are adapted in French, German, and Spanish, which represent distinct linguistic and cultural profiles. French and Spanish, as Romance languages, reveal how similar systems manage translation with regional variation, while German offers a contrasting Germanic perspective. Together, these languages provide diverse typologies and market contexts, making them ideal for studying how translation strategies and word formation vary across language families.

Acknowledgements

This research project was financially supported by Mahasarakham University.

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Endnotes

¹ Legendary Pokémon is a special category known for the exceptional power and rarity. They have also a significant role within the mythology or lore of the Pokémon universe.

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