ECONOMIC DEPARTMENT STAFF FINDS: NAME AMERICANIZATION PAYS

By Dr Costanza Biavaschi

Most Americans and Europeans have heard stories of ancestors Americanizing their names upon migration to the United States. A study by Dr Costanza Biavaschi and Dr. Zahra Siddique (joint with Dr. Corrado Giulietti, University of Southampton) goes beyond such anecdotes, providing evidence on the magnitude and consequences of this phenomenon. Using a random sample of migrants who naturalized to become American citizens in 1930 New York, the authors find that a third of European migrants abandoned foreign-sounding names to adopt a popular American name. This widespread practice paid off: migrants who Americanized their names achieved higher economic success than those who did not. In particular, migrants who changed their name into popular American names such as William, John or Charles earned up to 12% more than those who changed into less popular names or did not change names at all.

Digging through thousands of naturalization papers from New York City, the authors track a wide range of characteristics of more than 4,000 migrants becoming citizens by 1930. Since migrants had to fill out two separate documents five years apart for the naturalization procedure, their characteristics can be observed over time. The authors’ conclusions are based upon comparing migrants’ economic success over time, between those who kept their original name and those who chose more American names.

The study shows that migrants who changed their name into popular American names such as William, John or William earned up to 12% more than those who changed into less popular names (Figure 1). Name Americanization was more common among migrants who were low skilled, more discriminated against, or with fewer alternative means for socio-economic improvement.

The authors comment: “These findings are not only informative for Europe and the United States’ historical memory of the period, but also show that migrants faced an important tradeoff between individual identity and labor market success in the early making of modern America.” They continue: “Despite migrant occupational upgrading being limited at the time, migrants adopted various strategies to climb the occupational ladder. We discovered that name Americanization is one - effective but under-explored - such strategy.”

The analysis also considers the possibility that the choice of a new name reflected other factors related to migrants’ experiences that could have also had an impact on economic success, such as differing levels of ambition or language acquisition. To isolate the economic payoff resulting from having a new name from that attributable to other factors, the authors note that migrants with names of certain linguistic complexity – measured by the Scrabble points of the name when arriving in the US – decided to Americanize their names irrespective of other motivations. Using this strategy, the authors continue to find large payoffs from name Americanization.
UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE

Hamstead Hall Academy and the Department of Economics, University of Reading: University Challenge

By Simon Burke

For the last 3 years I have been fortunate to participate, as a judge, in an economics research competition for year 9 students at Hamstead Hall Academy, Birmingham. This event is the brainchild of a former student of the Department of Economics here at Reading, Melios Michael, who is Head of Mathematics at the school. In the first piece below he explains the development of his career, his motivations, and the origins of the competition, called the University Challenge. The second piece, about what it is like to be a participant, is written by year 11 student, Hannah Chander.

This year’s event was won by Anisa Aktar, Samiha Yasmin, Anisha Ferdous, and Zara Akhtar with excellent work on the topic ‘Should governments do more to reduce homelessness’. Theirs was the best of a strong set of projects my fellow judges and I had the difficult job of distinguishing between. It is a pleasure to be involved in this activity. Students are very well motivated and address the challenges enthusiastically and, usually, altruistically. The Department of Economics is very grateful to the school and its Executive Principal, Mr. Ken Morris, for the opportunity to work with them. We look forward to some high quality UCAS applications in due course!

Students and judges discuss posters in the second round of the University Challenge competition.
ambitions and supplements their applications to college, 6th forms, university and the workplace when they leave school.

The University Challenge has run at Hamstead Hall Academy for three consecutive years and has become a permanent annual event. I realised that if we could motivate students from year 9, the year in which they make their GCSE subject choices, there is a good chance they would be inspired and have high ambitions. This is evident from Hannah Chander’s article that follows. She was a contestant in the 2014 Challenge, and a member of the winning group who subsequently visited the University of Reading.

One challenge, three years, three different perspectives
By Hannah Chander

The University of Reading Challenge is an opportunity for year 9 students to taste an aspect of the real world. The Reading Economics Department allows real life to link in with economics and maths. Students can research a topic of their choice and present in front of a panel of judges who on the outside are equivalent to Simon Cowell but on the inside are really the David Walliams of this world. It’s a scary thought having to present a topic in 5 minutes and make sure you capture the judges’ attention. Overcoming nerves, projecting your voice and maintaining confidence is something the year 9s have to quickly learn to do.

Once they have passed the first round, the second round allows the students to receive feedback and develop their presentations. They also turn into Da Vinci and create posters summarising their topic. My group liked this round as it meant more time around junk food as our topic was fat tax! Students present their topic to a larger audience, gain further skills and add to their CV’s. Finally, three groups are chosen to present one final time.

The participation this year was amazing and I have full confidence that the University of Reading Challenge will thrive and prosper for future years, encouraging students to aspire to greater heights.

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NUIST NEWS

Simon Burke and Andi Nygaard

This April, three part 2 students, Freddy Farias (BA International Relations and Economics), Emma Wilks and Helen Bonney (both BSc Economics), visited Nanjing University of Information, Science and Technology (NUIST). These visits were part of the dual undergraduate degree agreement between the School of Management and Economics at NUIST and the Department of Economics at Reading. They were arranged under the NUIST SMART programme which has been set up to provide the opportunity for students from Reading and Nanjing to meet and share experiences in advance of students from Nanjing coming to Reading. The first such cohort will arrive for the 2017–2018 session.

Freddy, Emma and Helen considerably enlivened taught sessions run by staff Andi Nygaard and Simon Burke and certainly got to know their Chinese contemporaries. They were a great asset and we very much appreciate their enthusiastic and thoughtful contributions to the activities. The visits by Reading staff, lasting two weeks, were the second of the 2015–16 session providing input to the programme to complement that provided by NUIST colleagues, Drs. Vivien Burrows and Alexander Mihailov having travelled earlier in the year. For the funding of the NUIST SMART programme the Department of Economics is grateful to the School of Politics, Economics, and International Relations, the Internationalisation Fund of the University of Reading, and NUIST.

Below, Emma, Helen and Freddy describe their experiences, followed by a Nanjing perspective provided by second year NUIST students Lu Yang, Zhu Jinxin, and Zheng Yunxiaoxia.

From very early on in our first year at Reading University we were made aware of our department’s link with the Economics Department at NUIST. We never expected there to be a chance to accompany two of our lecturers, Andi Nygaard and Simon Burke, to NUIST in the Easter holidays of this year. So when the opportunity arose we jumped at it and, despite having lots of assignments and exams to prepare for, we managed to submit our application forms at the last minute!

Our role at NUIST was to assist Andi and Simon in leading classes, stimulate the conversation sessions, and build the relationship between us and the Chinese students. Much of our preparation for the sessions began a couple of days before take-off and much of the material we had to read was new content for us as Chinese economic policies differed significantly to those seen in Western Europe. The academic sessions began slowly as many of the students were reluctant to speak up. However, after dividing them into smaller groups we realised that they knew a great deal more economics than it first appeared - their quietness was not for a lack of economics knowledge but simply a lack of confidence in speaking in English.

With this in mind, the cultural exchange that we were able to provide was as important in building our relationship as our academic role. Luckily, the Chinese students were just as keen to get to know us outside the classroom, and we were treated with great hospitality throughout. For instance, on the first evening a group of them took us out to their favourite local restaurant and asked us many questions about life in the UK. We also asked them questions about life at NUIST, and China in general, and we quickly discovered many differences between our two realities. The most striking difference was that relating to halls - at NUIST they have a curfew from 10:30pm and the power gets switched off at 11pm every evening! Could you imagine the outrage that would cause here at UoR?
As the week drew to a close, we wanted to spend time with the whole class before we left so invited them all to a local 80s themed bar to give them a little taster of what a 'chilled' Friday night in the UK might be like. Little did we know that there was a karaoke platform inside the bar and it was they who ended up showing us a little taster of what a Chinese night out was like. This night was definitely the highlight of our week in Nanjing. It was the first time their class had been out together to relax like that and we hope it was the first of many.

The whole experience made us realise how challenging studying abroad can be. The language, the norms, the weather, and even the food, can all take some getting used to and it helps having students who are keen to welcome you available to help you settle in. We also realised the rewards that studying abroad brings: learning a new language, expanding networks, making new friends, tasting your new favourite dish. So we encourage all students to grab opportunities like these as they can truly open your eyes to the amazingly diverse world we live in.

By Freddy Farias, Emma Wilks, Helen Bonney

Time flies. The exchange activity between the University of Reading and NUIST has ended. A couple of weeks ago, two professors: Simon Burke and Andi Nygaard, and three students: Emma Wilks, Freddy Farias Arias and Helen Bonney came to our campus. We spent two weeks together, acquiring knowledge and happiness. In classes, we made conversations on economics coming up with questions such as ‘Should the UK government continue to cut government expenditure to reduce debt?’ Besides this brainstorming, we discussed how to design questionnaires and how to write a good essay. What is more, we had several computer classes, in which we mastered Excel skills. The skills we were taught were practical and were used in the process of presentations and essay writings. In the end, the social event was a really good opportunity for us to know more about each other. Overall, all of us enjoyed the two weeks, and learned at the same time. Looking forward to the next exchange event.

By Zhu Jinxin

I believe the past two weeks for everyone in our class is just like a long meeting with two old friends. But obviously not long enough because everything was even better, especially when we knew that we would have three new friends: Helen, Emma and Freddy. Compared with the last time they came here, Simon and Andi gave us plenty of time to talk about economics. Each of our classmates prepared two presentations by teamwork. Even for some students who were usually shy and did not talk too much, they are encouraged to stand in front of the whole class and speak loudly. Apart from the training, the communication is the most wonderful part. Everyone in our class likes our new friends. After class, we seemed to have seized every moment to chat with them, talking about study and different life. The last night when we came back from our local pub, we walked in the light rain. Everything seemed to be too nice to be real and no one can believe that it was only fourteen days since we first met. When it was time to say goodbye, we promised, ‘See you at Reading’.

By Freddy Farias, Emma Wilks, Helen Bonney

June sees England, Wales and Northern Ireland all pitting their wits on the football field against the finest footballing talent across all of Europe in the Euro 2016 football tournament in France. It also sees voters in all of the United Kingdom deciding whether or not Brexit, or British Exit, from the European Union should occur. It’s a busy month, and it’s a busy month for economists.

That the opinion of economists is sought on the potential implications of Brexit seems obvious (we’ll return to that), but it might be less clear why economists might be interested in Euro 2016. Economists like sport because it is a plentiful source of data - data on all sorts of things that are of interest like demand (attendances), recruitment policies (transfers), and performance (goals scored, wins). Equally, sports leagues and teams care about making the best possible decisions to affect outcomes in their favour, and often consult economists to do so.

To coincide with the opening day of the Euro 2016 tournament, James Reade organised a workshop at the university where prominent economists presented their research on various aspects of sport (Alex Bryson from UCL – see photo below). Research was presented on the sporting impact of hosting tournaments like Euro 2016, on the impact of managerial changes at football teams, on the ways in which football teams learn about player abilities, career
profiles of footballers, on scheduling of football, and more broadly on what economics can learn from football, and vice versa.

None of this is likely, however to make too much difference on the point in the tournament at which partial Brexit occurs, namely the point at which England, Wales and Northern Ireland have all been eliminated and sent home. The consensus though appears to be the quarter finals...

Whether or not full Brexit occurs of the UK from the EU is to be determined, however, on June 23. The campaigns for leaving and remaining are in full flow, but one thing appears to be unfortunately clear, namely that despite being very well placed to offer their advice, in general economists are not being listened to. Prominent Leave campaigner Michael Gove, when confronted by the reality of unanimous negative economic forecasts post-Brexit, responded by saying that "people in this country have had enough of experts", and that instead he had "faith in the British people".

The university has put on a wide range of Brexit-related events, including debates attended by our outgoing Head of Department Marina Della Giusta and many lecturers in the economics department have attempted to build Brexit examples into their lectures. Our courses in economics equip our students to be able to address complex issues such as Brexit with analytical rigour. Our students thus are amongst that elite group of people that Michael Gove believes the country has had enough of - they are experts on the economy. Thankfully, the country, and certainly our employers, haven’t had enough of economic expertise, so there’s no real need to worry on that front. All that remains to be said is to ensure that each of you doesn’t leave it too late to vote on June 23...