Basic Explanation of Polish Surname Endings

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THE POLISH NAME

Polish names have two main elements:
the **imię**, the first name, or given name;
and the **nazwisko**, the last name, family name (surname).

The usage of personal names in Poland is generally governed by civil law, church law, personal taste and family custom. The law requires a given name **(imię**) to indicate the person's *gender*.

Almost all Polish female names end in a vowel -a, and most male names end in a consonant or a vowel other than a. There are, however, a few male names that end in a, which are very old and uncommon, such as Barnaba, Bonawentura, Boryna, Jarema, Kosma, Kuba (a diminutive of Jakub) and Saba.

Maria is a female name that can be used also as a middle (second) name for males.

Since the High Middle Ages, Polish-sounding surnames ending with the masculine **-ski** suffix (including -**cki** and **-dzki**, and the corresponding feminine suffix **-ska/-**

cka/-dzka), were associated with the nobility (*Polish szlachta*), which alone, in the early years, had such suffix distinctions. However, they are widely popular today. Minor regional spelling differences also exist depending on whether the surname originated in *Polish, Czech*or *Slovak* **(-sky/-ský**).

THE Imię (given name)

A child in Poland is usually given one or two names; Polish registry offices do not register more than two. Among Catholics, who form the vast majority of the population, it is customary to adopt the name of a saint as an informal, third given name at confirmation, however, this does not have any legal effect. (This is reminiscent of the pre-Christian rite of the "first haircut" (Polish: postrzyżyny), which also involved giving the child a new name.

Parents normally choose from a long list of traditional names which may come from:

a Christian name, i.e., a Biblical name or a saint's name

a Slavic name of pre-Christian origin.

The names of Slavic saints, such as Wojciech (St Adalbert), Stanisław (St Stanislaus), or Kazimierz (St Casimir), belong to both of these groups. Slavic names used by historical Polish monarchs, e.g. Bolesław, Lech, Mieszko, Władysław, are common as well. Additionally, a few names of Lithuanian origin, such as Olgierd (Algirdas), Witold (Vytautas) or Danuta, are quite popular in Poland.

Traditionally, the names are given at a child's baptism. Non-Christian, but traditional, Slavic names are usually accepted, but the priest may encourage parents to pick at least one Christian name. In the past, two Christian names were given to a child so that he or she had two patron saints instead of just one. At confirmation, people usually adopt yet another (second or third) Christian name, however, it is never used outside church documents.

In Eastern Poland, as in many other Catholic countries, people celebrate name days (**Polish: imieniny**) on the day of their patron saint. On the other hand, in Western Poland, birthdays are more popular.
Today, in Eastern Poland, birthdays remain relatively intimate celebrations, as often only relatives and close friends know a person's date of birth. Name days, on the other hand, are often celebrated together with co-workers and other less-intimate friends. Information about whose name is associated with a given day can be found in most Polish calendars and on the internet.

The choice of a given name is largely influenced by fashion. Many parents name their child after a national hero or heroine, or a character from a book, film, or TV show. In spite of this, a great number of popular names have been in use since the Middle Ages.

Diminutives are popular in everyday usage, and are by no means reserved for children. The Polish language allows for a great deal of creativity in this field. Most diminutives are formed by adding a suffix.

For male names it may be -ek or the more affectionate -uś; for female names it may be -ka, or -nia / -dzia / -sia / cia respectively.

For example, Maria (a name which was once reserved to refer to the Virgin Mary; now the archaic form "Maryja" is used for this), has diminutives Marysia, Maryśka, Marysieńka, Mania, Mańka, Maniusia, etc.

Alternatively, augmentative forms (Polish: zgrubienie) may be colloquially used, often with scornful or disdainful intention. For example, Maria may be called Marycha or Marychna.

As in many other cultures, a person may informally use a nickname (pseudonim, ksywa) or instead of a given name. In 2009, the most popular female names in Poland were Anna, Maria, and Katarzyna (Katherine). The most popular male names were Piotr (Peter), Krzysztof (Christopher), and Andrzej (Andrew).

Nazwisko (surname)

Polish surnames, like those in most of Europe, are hereditary and generally patrilineal (passed from the father to his children).

A Polish marriage certificate lists three fields, the surnames for the husband, wife, and children. The partners may choose to retain their surnames, or both adopt the surname of either partner, or a combination of both; the children must receive either the joint surname or the surname of one of the partners.

However, a married woman usually adopts her husband's name and the children usually bear the surname of the father. The wife may keep her maiden name (nazwisko panieńskie) or add her husband's surname to hers, thus creating a double-barrelled name (nazwisko złożone). However, if she already has a double-barrelled name, she must leave one of the parts out—it is illegal to use a triple- or more-barrelled name. An exception is when one of the surnames is composed of a surname proper plus agnomen (przydomek), e.g., Maria Gąsienica Daniel-Szatkowska, where "Gąsienica Daniel is her husband's surname.

It is also possible, though rare, for the husband to adopt his wife's surname or to add his wife's surname to his family name (an example is businessman Zygmunt Solorz-Żak, who did both, taking his wife's name on his first marriage, and later appending his second wife's name to it). Polish triple-barreled surnames are known to exist; an example is the one borne by Ludwik Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski [pl], a university professor and writer, living in Canada.

The most widespread Polish surnames are Nowak, Kowalski, Wiśniewski and Wójcik.

Cognominal, Toponymic and Patronymic Surnames

Based on origin, *Polish* family surnames may be generally divided into three groups: **cognominal, toponymic and patronymic.**

Cognominal surname (nazwisko przezwiskowe) usually derived from nicknames, usually based on occupation, a physical description, or character trait of a person. You'll find here: Nowak (someone 'new' in the area), Bystroń (someone 'quick-witted'), Białas (someone 'white'), and Głowacz (someone with a big 'head'). See also: Szyszka (pine cone), Gwiazda (star), Noga (leg).

Examples:

Kowal, Kowalski, Kowalczyk, Kowalewski - from kowal, or "blacksmith"; or from Kowale" or Kowalewo (Smithville) in case of Kowalski and Kowalewski.

Młynarz, Młynarski, Młynarczyk - from młynarz, or "miller"; or from Młynary (Millersville) in case of Młynarski.

Nowak, Nowakowski, Nowicki - from nowy, or "new one"; or from Nowakowo or Nowice (Newmantown) in case of Nowakowski and Nowicki.

Lis, Lisiewicz, Lisowski - from lis, or "fox"; or from Lisowo (Foxville) in case of Lisowski

Toponymic surname (nazwisko odmiejscowe) usually derives from the name of a village or town, or the name of a topographic feature. These names are almost always of the adjectival form.

Examples:

Tarnowski - of Tarnów

Zaleski - of Zalesie

Górski - of Góra

Patronymic surname (nazwisko odimienne) derives from a given name of a person and identifies a person's father.

Examples:

Jan, Jachowicz, Janicki, Jankowski, Janowski - derived from Jan (John); or from Janice, Jankowo or Janowo (Johnstown).

Adamczewski, Adamczyk, Adamowski, Adamski - derived from Adam; or from Adamczewo / Adamowo (Adamsville).

Łukasiński, Łukaszewicz - derived from Łukasz (Luke); or from Łukasin (Luketown).

SURNAMES ENDING IN "SKI"

-EWSKI, -OWSKI, -IEŃSKI, -IŃSKI, and –YŃSKIS

The -ski is an adjectival suffix, which can be added directly to a stem -- as Piekarski means "of the baker (piekarz)" -- or can be compounded with other suffixes.

Common suffixes that can precede **-ski** are:

1.) **-ew-** or **-ow-** (basically the same thing, dependent on whether the stem ends in a consonant classified as hard or soft)

2.) **-in-** or **-ien-** or **-yn**. The **-yn** is added to stems ending in hard consonants, the other two added to "soft" stems; for all intents and purposes, **-ien-**can be regarded as a variant of **-in-**, often indicating some dialect difference in pronunciation.

3.) Both prefixes have a possessive meaning, so that **-owski/-ewski** and **-i[e]nski/-ynski** mean ***"of the _'s."*** In the suffix combinations **-inski and -ynski** the N is softened and spelled with an accent, which I render on-line as ń **(-iński and -yński**).

We also see these suffixes added to names without **-ski**, so that Jan means "John" and Janów means "of John," and Russian Stalin means "[man] of steel" (stal'). We see places called Janów, which just means "[place] of John." Suffixes can also be added to those suffixes, so that we also see Janowo, also meaning "[place] of John," and Lipiny, "[place] of the lindens" (from lipa, "linden").

Slavic linguists have written articles on when and why **-ew-/-ow-** are added in some cases, and why **-in-/-yn-** in others, but that gets into complicated issues that are

best left only to those who want to study Slavic linguistics in a serious way. The bottom line is that once either set of suffixes **-ow/-ew** and -**in/-yn** has been added to a stem to form a place name X, the suffix **-ski** can be further added to them to mean, in effect, "one from X."

Thus: kowal is "smith," Kowalew or Kowalewo is "[place] of the smith," and Kowalewski is "one from the place of the smith."

Or lipa is "linden," Lipiny is "place of the lindens," and Lipiński is "one from the place of the lindens." Incidentally, we see the **-in/-yn**suffix added sometimes without the preceding vowel, yielding names such as Lipno, also meaning "place of the lindens"; this place name, too, can yield the surname Lipiński. These processes are very common in Polish surname formation.

These suffix complexes **-ewski/-owski** and **-ński/-yński** can also be added directly to nouns sometimes to simply indicate a connection.

Thus Łomża is the name of a major town in Poland, and łomżyński is an adjectival form meaning "of Łomża." So surnames ending in these suffixes don't always have to refer to place names. More often than not they do, but they don't have to.

You might notice that there's considerable overlap in meaning between, say, Janów [kin or place of John] and Janowski [kin of John or one from John's place]. In fact, we sometimes see both names used, and in older records a family may appear with the forms used interchangeably. In more modern times the **-ski** forms have tended to predominate; but there are Poles named Janów. As with any aspect of onomastics, it doesn't pay to make flat generalizations -- almost anything you say that is correct most of the time can have glaring exceptions.

MORE ON… SURNAMES ENDING IN "SKI"

The Suffix -ski/-ska

"**Ski**" (also "**Sky**" in other regions) is a formative adjective, from the Proto-Slavic "ьskъ", which defined affiliation to something. It was also used with names of

territories and settlements to denote possession or place of origin.

The suffix, **-ski** (feminine: -**ska**), has been restricted to the nobility in Eastern Europe and some parts of central Europe since the High Middle Ages. It was the equivalent to nobiliary particles appearing in the names of nobility, such as in the Germanic von or zu. Almost all surnames borne by the nobility with the **-ski** (or **-sky**) suffix are preceded by a place name (toponymic) or other territorial designation derived from their main court, holdings, castle, manor or estate.

For example, the Polish nobleman Jan of Tarnów whose name in Polish is "Jan z Tarnowa" was equally known by the name "Jan Tarnowski"; this highlighted his nobility unlike the preposition of "**z**" alone which could be construed as a regular prepositional particle.

In the 19th century, a wave of seemingly noble sounding surnames began to appear among the common population, where a significant number of the bourgeoisie class, and even the peasantry, began to adopt or bear the noble **-ski** suffix. The **-ski** suffix was thus attached to surnames derived from a person's occupation, characteristics, patronymic surnames, or toponymic surnames (from a person's place of residence, birth or family origin). This caused a blur between the **-ski** bearing territorial toponymic surnames once a characteristic only borne by the nobility. As such, and contrary to a popular modern-day misconception, a person simply bearing the **-ski** suffix in their family surname or merely sharing the same toponymic surname as members of Poland's nobility, does not in itself denote that person too is a member of the nobility, of noble origin, or indeed connected to that particular family.

-SKI

*** I'm A -SKI, I Must Be Noble! ***

While Polish -ski names are, at least in theory, genetically connected with the upper classes of Polish society, the cognominal surnames are definitely more democratic as they stem from popular folk usage. Considering that most Poles have their roots in

rural areas this may be an even more apt candidate for the most "Polish" type of Polish surname

Again and again I hear "Someone told me names ending in **-ski** are noble. Is that true?" I've responded so often I'm sick of the whole subject. Still, it's a legitimate question, so let's start with it.

If you're talking about names found in records from, say, the 14th century, then yes, names ending in **-ski**were borne by nobles. So were names ending in **-owicz**, or **-ik**, or whatever suffix you care to mention. Back then, all surnames were noble! In other words, only nobles used surnames.

It wasn't until much later that non-nobles began using surnames regularly -- generally not until the 16th or 17th centuries. It's hard to be absolutely certain of the dates because there are very few records before the 1600s that mentioned non-nobles at all; so we have don't have much evidence as to when the practice of bearing unchanging, hereditary names spread to the middle class and the peasants. But by and large, most scholars agree that peasants seldom used surnames before the 1600s; there are exceptions to every rule, but this one is pretty reliable.

So at one time **-ski**indicated nobility. But that ceased to be true, oh, a good 300-400 years ago. When the use of surnames of any sort stopped being exclusive to nobles, so did the forms of the names themselves.

What does **-ski** mean? In Polish it's an adjectival suffix, meaning simply ***"of, from, connected with, pertaining to."*** The form **X-ski**is an all-purpose way of saying **"somehow associated with X."** Thus Warszawa means "Warsaw," and Warszawski means "of Warsaw." The noun piekarz means "baker," and the adjective piekarski means "of the baker, the baker's."

In surnames, **X-ski**usually began as a short way of indicating some close connection with X. Thus Piekarski would generally mean either "kin of the baker," or "one from the place of the baker." There are subsets of the **-ski** names that are especially likely to refer to place of origin -- we'll look at them in a minute -- but clearly a name such

as Warszawski would mean "one from Warsaw," or in a broader sense, "one connected with Warsaw in some way clear enough that calling this guy Warszawski makes sense." Similarly Bydgoski, literally "of Bydgoszcz," would mean "one from Bydgoszcz, one connected with Bydgoszcz."

Please notice: when **-ski**is added to a noun, a letter or two at the end of the noun may disappear: Piekarz -> Piekarski, Warszawa -> Warszawski. Sometimes the change is even greater, as in Bydgoszcz -> Bydgoski, Zamość -> Zamojski. Poles tended to add **-ski** to what they regarded as the base form of the noun in question, and clear away final suffixes or consonant combinations that weren't essential parts of the name.

The practical consequence of this is that a lot of **-ski** names referring to places are ambiguous; they may refer to a number of different places with names derived from the same base form. Thus you can't be positive Warszawski must refer to the capital of Poland. There may be another place, or two, or five, with names beginning Warszaw-; the surname, by itself, gives no clue which one it's referring to in a given instance. There's a Warszawa in former Zamość province; there's a Warszawice in Siedlce province; there's a Warszawiaki in former Lublin province; and a Warszawskie Przedmieście in Elbląg province. It is POSSIBLE the surname Warszawski could refer to any of them.

Obviously most of the time Warszawski would refer to the nation's capital. My point is that you can't take that for granted! The moment you assume that, it will surely turn out YOUR Warszawski was the one in 100 who came from Warszawa in Zamość province. That's why even surnames that refer to place names MUST be interpreted in light of a specific family's history -- it's the only way to make sure you're focusing on the right place.

Of course, a lot of **-ski**names don't refer to places at all. Piekarski might refer to a place named Piekary or something similar; but most of the time it probably started out meaning "the baker's kin." Kowalski would usually mean "the smith's kin" (from kowal, "smith"). Szczepański would usually mean "kin of Szczepan (Stephen)."

Nosalski can mean simply "kin of the big-nose" (nosal). This suffix can be added to all kinds of roots, whether they refer to a ancestor's place of residence or origin, his occupation, his first name, his most obvious physical feature, and so on.

-SKI vs. -SKA

Polish adjectives have different forms for the genders. Surnames ending in -**ski** are regarded as adjectives, so they, too, reflect gender with different endings. Thus Janowski is the nominative form for a male; Janowska is the same form for a female. The endings differ in the other cases, too: "of Janowski" is Janowskiego if referring to a male, Janowskiej if referring to a female. But the nominative forms are the ones we encounter the most, and you can save yourself some wear and tear if you just realize that **X-ska**normally means ***"Miss X-ski"*** or ***"Mrs. X-ski."***

Now nothing's ever too simple, and there is one factor that can throw a wrench into the works: names derived from nouns than end with **-ska**, e. g., deska, "board," maska, "mask," troska, "care, worry." These have to be handled on a case-by-case basis. But the rule of thumb is as stated above. When you see **-ska**, replace the **-a with -i** and you'll usually have what we regard as the standard form of the name.

The -ski ending and its derivations are the only ones in Polish that have feminine forms, where women have the feminine version ending in **-ska** instead. Historically, female versions of surnames were more complex, often formed by adding the suffix **-owa** for married women and **-ówna** for unmarried women. In most cases, this practice is now considered archaic or rustic.

When referring to two or more members of the same family and surname, the suffix **-ski** is replaced with the plural **-skich, -scy** or -**ccy** (plural masculine or both masculine and feminine) as well as **-skie** or **-ckie** (plural feminine).

<u>Feminine Suffixes</u>

Polish used to have special feminine suffixes which were added to a woman's surname. A woman who was never married used her father's surname with the

suffix -ówna or -'anka. A married woman or a widow used her husband's surname with the suffix -owa or -'ina / -'yna. Although these suffixes are still used by some people, mostly elderly and in rural areas, they are now becoming outdated and there is a tendency to use the same form of a nominal surname for both a man and a woman.

Feminine forms

One of the particularities of the Polish surname system is that the surname of a woman often differs from that of her husband or father. Today this is most noticeable in the adjectival names like Kowalski – the wife's name is Kowalska. However, in the past the system of feminine surname suffixes was much more elaborate, reflecting not only the sex but also the marital status of a woman. This basically means that one could tell whether a woman was married or maiden just upon hearing her last name. Here's how you could tell:

Maiden:

A woman who was never married used her father's surname with the suffix -ówna or -anka - the form depending on the final sound of the masculine surname (-ówna for consonant-ending, -anka for vowel-ending).
Example: Kordziak (father) – Kordziakówna (daughter)

Morawa (father) – Morawianka (daughter)

Wife:

A married woman or a widow used her husband's surname with the suffix -owa or -'na / -yna:

Examples: Nowak – Nowakowa; Koba – Kobina; Puchała – Puchalina

This tradition is embedded in an older folk usage that disappeared over the course of the 20th century and is seen today as a relic of a time forever gone – but it's still a part of culture.

-CKI and –ZKI

What about names ending in **-cki/-cka**and **-zki/-zka**? Essentially, these are just variants of **-ski/-ska.**Certain words end with consonants that, when combined with the basic ending -**ski**, produced a pronunciation change. Thus Zawadzki comes from zawada, "obstruction, fortress" + **-ski**. The final **-a** in zawada drops off, giving Zawadski. But it's hard to say **-d**- followed by an **-s**- (notice, in "gods" or "wads" or "lads" we always pronounce that final **-s** as a **-z**). Zawadzki seemed the more accurate way to spell this name.

But, just to complicate things, the combination -**dz**- in that instance is actually pronounced like -**ts**-, which Poles write with the letter -**c**-. So Zawacki is another way of spelling that same name. Either way, Zawadzki or Zawacki, it's pronounced roughly "zah-VAHT-skee," and just means "of the obstruction or fortress," or "from the place called Zawada or Zawady because at one time there was an obstruction or fortress there."

My advice is, treat **-cki**and **-zki** as variations of **-ski**. You don't really need to know why they're spelled differently. It's enough to recognize the difference, note the spelling variation, and move on.

WHAT CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED DURING IMMIGRATION?

When Polish individuals immigrate to countries with different languages and cultures, the often-difficult spelling and pronunciation of Polish names commonly cause them to be misspelled or changed.

A typical change is the loss of the gender distinction in adjectival surnames, especially visible for those ending in **-ski (fem.: -ska), -cki (fem.: -cka**) and -**dzki (fem.: -dzka).**

Western languages do not distinguish between male and female surnames, even if the language has gender-specific adjectives (like German, French or Spanish). As the surname is, in most cases, inherited from the father (or accepted from the husband),

the Western registries of birth and marriage ascribe the masculine form (the one ending in **-i**) to the female members of the family.

Slavic countries, in contrast, would use the feminine form of the surname (the one ending in -a). So the form Anna Kowalski would never be met within Poland, whereas it is commonly found in the US, Germany or Argentina. Another change is changing the final vowel **-i** of the endings **-ski**, **-cki** and **-dzki** into **-y**. These endings are common in Czech, Slovak and Ukrainian languages, but they never occur in Polish.

-SKI vs. –SKY

Lord, am I sick of this one! People are always asking things like "If it's spelled **-sky**, isn't that a Jewish name?" or "Can I conclude my Jablonsky was *Czech* instead of *Polish*?"

Historically the spellings of Eastern European surnames have varied so much -- even back home in Europe, let alone in North America -- that you can't lay out a hard and fast rule for this **-ski/-sky** business. The rule of thumb, however, is that **-ski** usually is associated with Poles; **-sky** may be associated with Czechs, Ukrainians, Russians, etc. There are jillions of exceptions, but if you want a basic rule to go by, that's it.

That's because Polish spelling rules *say* ***-k-*** can never be followed by **-y**, only by **-i**. Well, Poles arrived in this country writing their names in the same alphabet we use. Some of the special Polish letters caused problems, but the **-ski** ending was easy enough to copy and use. So as a rule Poles tended to spell their names **-ski** even after they came to America.

Religion was not really a factor. Jews tended to use whatever spelling was regarded as correct where they lived. As I say, in Polish **-sky** is incorrect, **-ski** is correct, so Jews living among Poles usually spelled it **-ski**. Jews living among Czechs spelled it **-sky** because that is correct in Czech. If they lived in what is now Belarus or Russia or Ukraine -- as millions did -- their names were written in the Cyrillic alphabet, and

could be rendered in our alphabet as **-ski**, **-sky**, **-skiy**, **-skyi**, **-skyj**, **-skij**, and so on. Most often it ended up as **-sky**, so that spelling seems to predominate among Jewish immigrants. But there were and are plenty of Jews in America who spell their names **-ski**.

There seems to be a tendency among German- and English-speakers to spell this Slavic suffix as **-sky**, to the point that even Polish immigrants quit fighting it and accepted that spelling. I'm not sure what accounts for that tendency, but I have a theory: Czech influence. In Czech **-sky (actually with an accent over the y)** is the correct spelling. Over the centuries Germans have dealt a lot with Czechs, and that experience may have convinced them **-sky** is the right way to spell this suffix. And when Poles immigrated to the U. S., they often found sizable Czech communities already flourishing here; in many cities Poles went to Czech churches and social events, until they were numerous enough to establish their own. Since the Czechs had come first, and the Poles often mixed with them, it's understandable that Americans became familiar with the Czech spelling first, and regarded it as standard. That may explain why, in Europe and especially in America, the **-sky** often shows up in instances where it was not "correct."

Is the -ski Surname Always Polish?

While the -ski suffix was once an all-Slavic grammatical feature which resulted in this kind of name being formed in many Slavic lands (compare popular Macedonian name suffix -ovski), the popularity of the Polish -ski name in Poland may have contributed to the overall popularity of the name: first in Eastern Europe and then globally. Today, the -ski in the name may still – with high probability – serve as an indication of someone's Polish origins. Remember that when you consider people with the -ski names in Russia, like Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Vaslav Nijinsky or Felix Dzerzhinsky – you can be sure that many of them have some Polish background.

-OWICZ or –EWICZ

This suffix simply means **"son of."** Here, too, the difference between -owicz and **-ewicz** is of no great importance to non-linguists; some names tend to show up with one or the other, and some show up with both. But the basis meaning of **X-owicz** or **X-ewicz** is **"son of X."**

What happened here is that the possessive ending **-ow/-ew** had the suffix **-icz**tacked onto it. That suffix **-icz** or **-ycz** is how Poles once said "**son of**," so that "son of Jan" was Janicz or Janycz; "son of Kuba" was Kubicz or Kubycz. But as time went on the Poles were influenced by the tendency of other Slavs to use **-owicz** or **-ewicz** instead of plain **-icz**. *NOTE: Are typically associated with Jewish surnames*.

By the way, **-owicz** is just the Polish way of spelling the suffix we see in many other Slavic names as **-ovich** or -**ovič** (the so-called haček in Czech). The spelling varies from language to language, but it almost always means "son of."

-AK-/-EK/-IK/-KA/-KO/-UK/-YK

Suffixes with a **-k-**generally began as diminutives. In other words, Jan is the Polish form of "John," and Janek or Janko is much like "Johnny." English, however, typically has only a couple of diminutive suffixes, **-y** or **-ie**. Polish (and the other Slavic languages) have tons of them. Most have a **-k-** in there somewhere, or the**-k**- has been modified by the addition of further suffixes (**e. g., -czak, -czyk**). As a rule, in surnames a suffix with **-k**- means something like **"little"**or **"son of."**

Thus Jan is "John," Janek or Janko is "little John, Johnny," Jankowicz is "son of little John," Jankowo is "[the place] of little John" (or "of John's son"), and Jankowski is "from the place of little John or John's son." You see how different suffixes can combine to add layers of meaning to the basic name?

The original usage of these suffixes was to indicate a diminutive form. But they also came to be used in other ways, usually meaning **"associated with, related to, exhibiting the quality of."** Nowak comes from nowy, "new" + **-ak,** to mean "new guy in town," and Stasik means "one associated with Staś" = "kin of Staś."

Also, these suffixes were often added to nouns to serve as a term for a person or object perceived as related to whatever the base root meant. Thus Bartek started as a nickname from Bartłomiej (Bartholomew), and meant "little Bart, son of Bart." But once Bartek existed as a name, it could come to be used more loosely as the noun bartek, which means "yokel, peasant, hick from the sticks." This happened because folks perceived Bartek as a name popular primarily among people in rural areas, so it came to be used as a common noun for such a person. We have done similar things in English; you might refer to a redneck in general as a "Billy Bob" or any other name perceived as common among rural folk.

Similarly, sowa means "owl," and sówka, literally "little owl," can be a term for a specific kind of owl, Athene noctuae. But it's also used as a term for the Noctuidae family of moths. Apparently something about those moths reminded people of little owls, and the term stuck. Thus you have to be careful when you interpret surnames with these diminutive suffixes: the "little X" may be turn out to be a term for something not readily apparent. If you trace the development of the name back far enough, you can usually see what the semantic connection was. But it's often pretty obscure until you dig deep.

-IAK

Essentially, the suffix **-iak**is the same thing as **-ak**; both are diminutive suffixes, but **-iak**differs only in that it involves softening or palatalization of the root's final consonant. Thus in some names we see **-ak**added directly to a root with no palatalization, e. g., Nowak, Pawlak; and in others we see the palatalization, e. g., Dorota + -iak = Dorociak, Jakub + -iak = Jakubiak, Szymon + -iak = Szymoniak.

The basic meaning of **-ak/-iak** is diminutive, but especially when applied to first names, it tends to have a patronymic significance. Thus "Jakubiak" means "little Jakub," but much the same way as if someone saw me walk by and said "There's Fred" (Fred's my middle name and it's the one I go by, I hope this isn't too confusing!) and then a moment later my son toddled along and he said "There goes little Fred," i. e., "Fred's son." So in most cases where **-ak/-iak** is appended to the

root of a first name we can translate it as **"son of."** However, it's not used exclusively in that way, for instance there is a noun "Krakowiak" which means "one from Krakow." Polish suffixes rarely have one and only one meaning (unfortunately; life would be much easier if they did!).

I'm not sure why sometimes the suffix is added with palatalization and why it's not. No doubt Polish linguists have addressed this very question, and somewhere in my sources there is probably a learned article on this very subject. But I can't find it at the moment -- and besides, to make sense of it one would probably need a Ph.D. in Slavic historical linguistics. I think it suffices for our purposes to say that the suffix can be added either way, without palatalization (Pawel + -ak = Pawlak) or with it; and if it's added with palatalization, that is indicated either by interposing an -i- (Jakub + -i- + ak) or by modifying the root's final consonant (Dorota + -ak to Doroti- + -ak to Doroci- + -ak = Dorociak). There are ways to tell which final root consonants add -i- and which change the letter, but again, this is probably more information than you want!

-ANKA, -INA/-YNA, -OWA/-EWA, -ÓWNA/-EWNA

Finally, these suffixes differ from the others I've mentioned in that they're not intrinsic parts of the surnames. Jankowski is a different name from Jankowicz; Jankowiczowa is not a different surname from Jankowicz, but merely a special form of it. These suffixes all mark feminine versions of surnames that take the form of nouns, not of adjectives ending in **-ski** or **-cki** or **-zki**. To arrive at the standard form of the name you have to remove the suffix (and sometimes add an ending): Jankowiczowa = Mrs. Jankowicz, Kościuszkowa = Mrs. Kościuszko.

In standard Polish **-owa**or -**ewa** indicates a married woman, and **-ówna/-ewna** an unmarried one. As I said, Jankowiczowa is Mrs. Jankowicz, but Jankowiczówna is Miss Jankowicz; Kowalewa = Mrs. Kowal, Kowalewna = Miss Kowal. In records we often see **-ówna/-ewna** forms as maiden names.

The suffixes **-ina/-yna**are added to noun-derived names ending in **-a**, and usually indicate a married woman; the corresponding form for unmarried women was **-anka** or **-ianka (sometimes -onka or -ionka**). So Mrs. Zaręba is "pani Zarębina," and Miss Zaręba is "panna Zarębianka."

I must add, however, that in regional dialects you sometimes see **-anka** or **-onka** added to adjectival surnames, and even used for any female, so that a Mrs. Kowalski might appear as "Kowalszczanka." That is not correct in mainstream Polish; but you may run into in records from some regions, especially northeastern and southeastern Poland

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