University of Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Translingual discrimination in Chinese learners' English naming practices

ROBERT WEEKLY

Translingual Discrimination

‘a systemic linguistic inequality characterized by the ‘orders of translingual indexicality’—a linguistic and communicative order of indexicality emerging from the results of mass transnational mobilizations, in which transnational identities’ specific linguistic and communicative backgrounds are either validated or dismissed as soon as they mobilize in the transnational arena’ (Dovchin and Dryden, 2022, p.369).

Monolingual ideologies and practices produce unequal linguistic power relationships

Language-based discrimination against transnational migrants in the host society

Labour Market & English language teaching

Name discrimination
- Migrants pre-judged negatively
- Assumed to have lower education and intelligence
- Service provision (Libraries e.g., Tonin, 2018, Hamer, 2021)
- Candidates not interviewed because of 'ethnic' name (Kang et al. 2016)
- Denied jobs based on names. Deprived of education, employment, health, social security (Dovchin, 2019)

Name Microaggressions
- Mispronunciations or misspelling
- Failing to remember
- Mocking (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012)

CV Whitening (Kang et al, 2016)
- Anglicising names and previous educational institutions

Renaming Practices (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012)
- Anglicising birth name
- Adopting an 'English name'

Racial Microaggressions

Kohli & Solórzano (2012) - K-12 In America (Aged 17-18 years)

Students of colour - Black, Latina/Asian American, Pacific Islander and mixed race

Disrespect of names in schooling experience

- Teachers changed students' names (Frank)
- Make a cultural joke (Don't want to call you Ghandhi)
- Comparing name to western object (Sandel, Maitai)
- Mispronunciation (Induces laughter or anger)
- Avoid calling students by name (Become invisible)

Devalues cultural heritage

Reinforces belief that they are outsiders - adopt American name

Chinese English naming practices in ELT

Conformity – Everyone has one

Implicitly or explicitly forced by teachers/institutions

To facilitate interaction with non-Chinese

To be remembered

To access membership of an imagined international community (Cotterill 2020; Diao 2014; Sercombe et al. 2014; Weekly & Picucci-Huang, 2022, Picucci-Huang, and Weekly, 2024)

Personal account

Nicola Sum - Australian born Chinese - doesn't speak Chinese

Apologises if she mispronounces names at the beginning of class

Students offer anglicised Chinese names

'It seems a small expectation for their teachers to use the correct name' (Lahiri-Roy et al., 2021 p.11)

'How can we teach about social justice, diversity, and inclusion if we cannot address young people by their name? (Lahiri-Roy et al., 2021 p.11)

Methodology

Data Collection

- 20 group Interviews with 51 pre-sessional students in UK
- 44 item questionnaire with 15 open questions
  - Distributed via email to UG and PG at Sino-foreign University + small cohorts of students on Pre-sessional courses in the UK
  - 357 Respondents – response rate of 19.6%
- 9 two-to-one semi-structured interviews

Questionnaire

357 respondents

Forced	Not forced	Maybe forced
27%	54%	19%

Foreigners often mispronounce their names

Preference of the tutor

Requirement of the English study environment

Ideologically constructed

Student 1:	In university I majored in applied linguistics erm as you know erm and I feel that when I was in university erm especially when we are in year one the teachers will erm require us to have an English name for them to erm call us is more like a preference for them so at that time I create erm I picked not create I picked an English name for me
Researcher:	So do you feel like in year 1, they encourage you to have an English name?
Student 1:	Yes
Researcher:	Why?
Student 1:	I think, he took the register list, and walk around, and he was like, do you have an English name? Okay

Pronunciation

Researcher:	So why didn't you just directly use your Chinese name
Student 2:	you see erm I have a LSAC test exam and the teacher the tutor called my Chinese name and he pronounced very bad and my Chinese name look sounds like it's very weird yes because my pin yin is XXX XXXX and it's English do not have the name at the beginning like x so so he cannot pronounce very well so I decide to change my name just Zoe

Changing Names

59% changed their names

- Too common/normal
- New environment
- Grown to dislike the name
- Name given by teacher – assert independence

English name discrimination

Pizza is a funny name is once mocked by an English teacher.

Because my teacher and friend told me that it was not so proper as a name. (Ether)

because it is not suitable to have a religious name (Holy)

My teacher said this name is not suitable for such a cute girl， hah. (Bread)

My teacher said Kitty's meaning was not good.

I heard that this name is for strippers... (Angel)

Because that Candy cannot be a formal name in daily life.

Cherry has a bad meaning break one's cherry破处

There was three Linda in my class， so the teacher helped me to change my name.

Duplication

Alice is the name my first English teacher gave me. I was very nervous that many of my classmates called Alice. Teacher even needed to add Alice1， Alice2 for distincting different students. It annoyed me so I changed my English name.

Student 1: my friends mentioned because she name is Cindy and in her classroom had two cindy and the tutor said the big Cindy or the small Cindy so he’s she's feel like very rude and she's feel like he she very dislike that tutor and if that the tutor can change the change the calling her like the prettier Cindy or the lovely Cindy or you can use this like type like it's instead of bigger Cindy or smaller Cindy is Cindy one Cindy two it's very rude I think yeah

Genderised names

Ashley:	Erm I searched the internet because I think it's lovely but the tutor told me it's a man's name
Robert:	It's a
Ashley:	Man's name
Snow:	I think it can a man
Robert:	Can be a man or woman
Snow:	Yeah it's both

Self-reflection

Nika:	Nika. and you've changed it.
Robert:	I changed it? So Nicky is not really your name? What is your name?
Nika:	I chose Nika.
Robert:	Nika how do you spell that?
Nika:	N-I-K-A.
Robert:	So I should call you Nika.
Nika:	Yeah. But you said it's not good because it sounds like...
Robert:	Knickers, it sounds a bit like knickers.
Nika:	So I changed it.
Robert:	I remember now. You can go back to Nika. Sorry I feel like I've forced a name on you.

Conclusion

- Recognise Eurocentric bias
- Teachers expand cultural understanding
- Important to recognise the power teachers have on students' sense of self (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012)

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