


Chapter 2

Correct Pronunciation of Student Names: A Foundation for Language Learning

Anita Bright

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6163-853X>
Portland State University, USA

Christopher L. Cardiel

Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, USA

ABSTRACT

Across multiple aspects of one's life, names matter, and this can be particularly important in a language-learning setting. Speaking to identity, belonging, community, individuality, temporality, and place, the names we carry—formal names, public names, pet names, nicknames, adopted names—serve as markers to identify the ways we nest into the broader context of the world. When our chosen names are mangled, tangled, or forgotten, the symbolic violence and resultant wounds have the potential to be devastatingly life-changing. In addition to providing an overview of naming practices and their significance, this chapter gives voice to ways pedagogical practices can be influenced by this urgency to know my students as whole, contextualized individuals, and to speak the names each student desires, working to identify the ways in which name factors into my professional practice as a critical educator.

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INTRODUCTION

They call me Hell.

They call me Stacey.

They call me her.

They call me Jane.

That's not my name.

That's not my name.

That's not my name.

That's not my name.

--The Ting Tings, 2007

Names. Names hold so much more than just the component syllables, characters, and exhaled sounds. The ways names are selected, “worn” throughout life, heard in a range of contexts, and employed as identity markers can shape how a person moves through the world—including the world of school.

For many students, the world of school can include learning a new language, different from the language or languages spoken at home or in previous school settings. Adding a new language can involve risk, and learning a new language can be one of the most complex and taxing experiences a student may encounter. This complexity and level of demand can be amplified if the student is also learning to live and thrive in a new context while adding an additional language (DeKeyser, 2005). Further, the intensity of these demands can be heightened even further if the student finds that their teachers are not from culturally familiar nor culturally congruent backgrounds (Bashosh, Nejad, Rastegar, & Marzban, 2013). The chances for disconnect and dissonance between students and teachers are omnipresent (Karanauskienė & Danilevičienė, 2015), and teachers are called upon to do everything possible to ensure all students are nested comfortably and reverently into the classroom context, as a means to ensure the students’ social and emotional well-being, and as a means to facilitate an enriching learning environment.

Building this socially and emotionally safe, nurturing, and enriching learning environment is essential for all students, but takes on a fresh urgency when students are adding a new language. In a 2019, Teimouri, Goetze, and Plonsky conducted a meta-analysis of research from 97 studies conducted 23 countries, to explore the ways affective factors, and specifically anxiety, can impact language learning. In their summary, they concluded that, “anxiety has a moderate, negative association with achievement” (p. 385), which underscores the idea that reducing student anxiety can facilitate language learning.

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