Reading and Righting the Names at a Convocation Ceremony: Influences of Linguistic Ideologies on Name Usage in an Institutional Interaction

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At a Canadian university with a diverse population, orators at convocation ceremonies follow a protocol to facilitate the correct pronunciation of names. I describe the protocol and analyze one name-announcement segment, incorporating data from interviews with faculty and students. I argue that linguistic ideologies influence and reflect the way names are used in institutional interactions. In an institutional discourse of multiculturalism, names are seen as symbols of persons, and efforts to say names correctly are demonstrations of respect. This can be undermined by orators' practices, which focus on names as words and mark some non-English names as "difficult," such as repeated verification and halting pronunciation. For students with these names, this may contribute to negative feelings about being treated as outsiders in the dominant society. Attention to linguistic ideologies reveals that the university's protocol is as much a mechanism for reducing uncertainty among orators as for treating students respectfully.

Personal names and social identities at Western University

This article contributes to studies of personal names in use, not only as referents, but as linguistic resources in the performance of identities (Alia, 2007; vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2006; Reyes, 2013; Zheng and Macdonald, 2010). An examination of how names are used in multiple ways, with variations and alterations, by different people in different contexts, deepens our understanding of how identities are constructed. I report on a pilot study identifying positive and negative experiences of people studying or working at Western University ("Western") in Ontario, Canada, who have non-English names or who deal with a diversity of names in their work-related tasks.

The focus is on a specific speech event, during which graduates' names are read aloud at a public ceremony. This analysis of the treatment of personal names sheds light on how linguistic ideologies emerge through interactions between individuals and institutions, and how these interactions in turn shape experiences of and attitudes toward the multiple and varied identities which are celebrated in public discourses of "diversity" and "multiculturalism."

Discourses of diversity and multiculturalism play a significant role in framing institutional interactions in Canada. For example, the "Campus Life" section of Western's web site asserts that "diversity is one of the keys to Western's success" and that "the University is committed to providing culturally sensitive and inclusive services to all students, faculty and staff, while embracing the multiculturalism which defines our campus body" (Western University, 2013). This echoes the discourse of multiculturalism that permeates Canadian society and is promoted by the Canadian government in its policies, publications, and websites. To illustrate, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2012) boasts:

> In 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy [. . .]. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging.

I investigate how such policies and values are enacted in one kind of interaction between representatives of an institution (i.e. faculty and staff) and the institution's constituents (i.e. students). My analysis considers how "a sense of belonging" among students is created or hindered through name-related language use, and what "culturally sensitive and inclusive services" means in a specific context where names are foregrounded. Investigating how multiculturalism is actually lived, I focus on linguistic ideologies in which ideas, beliefs, and attitudes about language and identity converge.

Linguistic ideologies

My theoretical approach is grounded in linguistic anthropology and involves a detailed analysis of language use in a particular sociocultural context. I focus on how names are spoken and the ways in which people talk about the names of others in an institutional setting where multiple cultural and linguistic practices intersect. The analysis is informed by investigations of the ways in which linguistic features, specifically pronunciation and word choice, are used to index identities (Bucholtz, 2011; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Reyes, 2005). Word choices involving name components and variations in pronunciation of names are especially illuminating because they are motivated by influential ideologies, and as Alia's (2007) work on political onomastics demonstrates, even small naming choices are political.

Linguistic ideologies can be defined as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein, 1979: 193). In other words, beliefs about language and beliefs about categories of people are used to make and explain certain linguistic choices. Linguistic ideologies,[1] according to Woolard (1998: 3), involve the interrelations between individuals and institutions, serving as "a mediating link between social forms and forms of talk," and creating ties between language and identity, aesthetics, morality, and

epistemology. I draw attention to the ways in which personal names are constituted in particular linguistic ideologies in order to elucidate how names are treated both as units of language (combinations of sounds and written characters) and as symbols of persons (identified individually and as members of social categories). These ideologies shape how identities and relationships are constructed in institutional interactions, such as conferring a degree at a convocation ceremony. I show how saying a name in different ways has implications for how the person is identified, while also marking the speaker, and the relationship between the two, in specific ways.

Method

Western University has a diverse population with about 30,000 students, including a large number of international students from a hundred countries (pers. comm. Registrar's Office, June 22 2012). Most domestic students come from the greater Toronto area and the rest of southwestern Ontario, which is where the majority of immigrants to Canada have initially settled in recent decades (Hou, 2005). This means there is a great diversity in names and naming practices among Western's students, providing a suitable multicultural site.

The analysis centers on two convocation ceremonies from June 2012, which provide easily accessible data on how names are pronounced. I made audio recordings of the ceremonies and compared the orators' pronunciations to the list of names in the program and to handwritten notations on one set of name cards. It would have been useful to have an assessment by students afterward indicating whether their name was pronounced correctly, but this was practically impossible for my pilot study given the logistics of conducting hundreds of exit interviews and obtaining informed consent. Future research may address this limitation.

The data include transcripts of interviews with four faculty members who served as orators in the June 2012 ceremonies, five administrative staff and twenty-one students. Orators discussed names they found challenging or remarkable, the process of orating, their linguistic background, and experiences with their own name. Interviews with staff and students were conducted by the author and two research assistants prior to convocation, as part of the pilot study investigating practices, choices, attitudes, and memorable experiences involving personal names. Transcripts of all interviews were analyzed to identify common themes and a range of ideologies related to names circulating within Western's population. Additionally, I draw on notes taken during my own experience as a volunteer orator in June 2013.

Convocation as a speech event

Convocation is the public ceremony celebrating the completion of a university degree. Here, I focus on the part of the ceremony where graduates' names are announced as they collect their diplomas. An orator reads three names and these graduates walk across the stage in sequence, before an audience of family, friends, and classmates. Graduates are "hooded" by a faculty member (the hood is placed over the graduate's head and hangs around the neck) and, as they leave the stage, they receive their diplomas from a staff member.

This segment of convocation is significant because it marks the end of a student's university experience. It is symbolic as a summary interaction between student and institution which serves the performative function (Austin, 1962) of granting a degree by saying aloud the full, officially recognized name, in front of witnesses, thereby transforming students into graduates. Stripping away the rest of the ritual and pageantry, the calling out of names is the part of convocation that counts the most and that is so eagerly awaited. The importance of the performative aspect of announcing names at convocation is indicated by the multiple audiences who evaluate whether it was done successfully. The graduate whose name is called has to recognize her own name and find the pronunciation acceptable. The graduate's family and friends sitting in the audience must also recognize the name of the person they have come to see so they can be properly attentive to the moment. Other convocation personnel have to recognize the name called in order to match it to names on their list so they can select the corresponding diploma to deliver, or to take their correct position for hooding specific graduates. The orators should also be satisfied with their own performance. Finally, other spectators make judgments (perhaps subconsciously) about whether the orator appeared to be having difficulty or not, the familiarity of the names, and the general flow of the proceedings.

These are not trivial matters, as faculty and staff reported past instances where names were misread and various troubles resulted, such as graduates missing their opportunity to walk across the stage, family members not realizing their graduate had been called and "missing the moment," staff members failing to locate the correct diploma, and one-time orators refusing to volunteer again after feeling that they had made embarrassing mistakes. Given the meaning that convocation holds in the lives of the graduates and their families, getting the names right and having the ceremony proceed smoothly are given importance by the university.

The pronunciation protocol

This section describes Western's off-stage and on-stage protocol for maximizing the chance of names being pronounced correctly at convocation. Orators are volunteer faculty members, usually recruited via email based on the following qualifications: "faculty members, who should be reasonably well-known to the members of the graduating class. Orators should have a clear, strong, confident speaking voice that will be understood by members of the audience" (pers. comm. office of the dean of Social Science, October 1 2012). There is no requirement that orators be familiar with other languages or have experience with diverse names. The main criteria are confidence and a clear, strong voice. Volunteers are, therefore, a self-selecting group who feel confident in pronouncing unfamiliar names. Interviewed orators indicated that those who have volunteered once are often asked to do it in subsequent years, and that they gain experience this way.

Before the ceremony begins, graduates are assembled in a gymnasium away from the auditorium. They are told to line up in alphabetical order in front of signs indicating their degree group. Orators and other volunteers are each given a portion of the name cards and instructed to distribute the cards and verify with each student how the name should be said. This involves checking pronunciation and making any changes to the components of the name. During this procedure, handwritten notations of changes or guides to pronunciation may be made on the cards to assist

the orator, but there are constraints on how this should be done. The chief orator for the 2013 ceremony, in which I participated, cautioned that annotations should be "simple." "We tell them [orators] not to spend too much time on annotations because there's no time. We have to get the kids their cards." Furthermore, he notes that "overly annotated cards can be a hindrance for orators" and "elaborately changed names means staff will not know what diploma to pull." Remarkably, those making the annotations are not usually the same orators who read the names during the ceremony. With a large number of graduates and only about ten minutes for completing the card distribution, an orator who announces a particular list of names will have only personally verified a small portion of those names.

After the name cards have been distributed and verified, the graduates enter the auditorium. When it is their turn, each graduate hands the name card to the chief orator, who reads it softly and confirms the pronunciation with the graduate. The chief orator then hands the card to the orator at the microphone and whispers the name. The orator calling the names looks at the original name on the card, interprets the notations, matches this to what was whispered from the chief orator, makes a final decision about pronunciation and finally announces the name. All of this cognitive processing happens very quickly as the orator has to say three full names in about eight seconds to keep the ceremony flowing. Thus, the orator's successful performance — reading the names in a confident, clear, strong voice, following a regularly timed rhythm — is the product of institutional interactions occurring both before and during it.

Linguistic ideologies: names as words

The name cards are a crucial element in the protocol which aims to ensure correct pronunciation of names. They offer evidence of linguistic ideologies at work, in which names are treated as written words which orators must correctly read aloud.

The name components are arranged on the cards with separate lines for the given name, middle name, and last name fields. Capital letters are used for all name components, with no accent marks. To emphasize the importance of the verification and notation procedure, consider that in one of the degree groups from the convocations I recorded there were a total of 283 names. Of that total, 188 (66%) had at least one non-English component.[2] This means that at least two-thirds of the names presented potential challenges to the orators. Allowing for possible variations in English names as well, the potential for error is even greater.

There is no standard form of notation for the name cards; the selection of marked features depends on the individuals doing the verification and reflects their ideological evaluations of what are difficult or ambiguous aspects of the name-as-word. Notations include crossing out or writing in components, marking stressed syllables with an acute accent or underlining, and rewriting components using English orthography or ad hoc symbols to represent a phonetic pronunciation. Some illustrations are provided below. Italics indicate handwritten notations. Underlining, acute accent marks and strike through lines represent similar handwritten notations.

    a)   Jenny ~~Shi Jia~~
    b)   ~~Sung Min~~ *Sylvia* Kang
    c)   Kader_a_li

   d)   Belchos > *chō* written above "cho"
   e)   Aboalola > *Abou-Álola*
   f)   Hyunook > *Hee-Un-Ook*
   g)   Nguyen > *Win*

While 188 names had at least one non-English component, only 60 of the 283 cards had notations, leaving many ambiguities. For example, notations were made for one component, such as marking the stressed syllable in the first name, but no guidance was provided for other components. Certain linguistic features were ignored completely. These may have been considered irrelevant or beyond the competence of the volunteers to represent graphically and the orators to successfully interpret and phonetically produce. For instance, tone was never marked for names originating from tone languages. Likewise, non-English sounds such as a trilled [r] or nasal vowels were also not marked. Aside from the time constraint for making annotations, one possible (and likely) explanation for this is that some graduates had already altered their names to reflect an Anglicized pronunciation to accommodate the English-language context of the ceremony. This point will be developed in the next section.

Examining the notations on the name cards, we see linguistic ideologies at work in the selection of which features require or deserve attention and how these should be marked to properly instruct the orator. The act of making a notation (or choosing not to) involves assumptions about another person's linguistic competence, about the relative salience and significance of phonetic features, and about what counts as interpretable ways to represent linguistic phenomena orthographically. Ad hoc orthographic systems, such as those used for the name cards, cannot be conceptualized as simply generating speech from writing "but rather are symbols that themselves carry historical, cultural, and political meanings" (Woolard, 1998: 23).

There are two types of notations. The first type, including phonetic rewrites and stress-marking, reflects the volunteers' interpretations and assumptions about the interpretations of other English-speaking readers. The second type reflects the graduates' agency in their self-presentation; for example, by omitting their middle name or adding an English component. The name cards, thus, involve a confluence of linguistic ideologies and represent a negotiation between the graduate and the institutional representative about how to most appropriately name the graduate for that occasion. It is not an open negotiation, however, because the institutional need for "legibility" — the unambiguous identification of individuals using standard administrative techniques (Scott et al., 2002) — restricts the kinds of alterations that can be made to the official name on the card. In fact, Western's handbook lists allowable changes to the "complete legal name" that appears in student records and stipulates that requests for any other "alteration, deletion, substitution or addition must be accompanied by acceptable documentation [. . .] [and must be made] in writing to the Office of the Registrar" (Western University, 2011: 4). In this way, ideologies of names as words and as symbols for individual persons are intertwined.

Linguistic ideologies: names as persons

Institutional requirements are only one factor influencing how graduates are named at convocation. Analyzing the card notations and interviews with orators, other

faculty, and students, it is clear that certain expectations and attitudes about ways of speaking and categories of people (i.e. linguistic ideologies) develop from individual subjective experiences, and that these ideologies and experiences also shape how the institutional interaction plays out.

Faculty, staff, and students reported several factors that make some names more "difficult" in multilingual and multiethnic interactions. Names are considered "difficult" if people are uncertain about pronunciation or spelling, have a hard time remembering the name, cannot readily identify the gender of the name-bearer, or if the name does not "fit" into premade forms, database fields, or other identification systems. In the latter case, the lack of fit might be due to the number of letters in the name, the number of components, the ordering of components, or the inclusion of components of an unknown type. In terms of pronunciation, long names (more than three syllables or more than three components) make it harder for people unfamiliar with the language of origin of such names to determine stress placement or to parse combinations of consonants and vowels. Additionally, names with non-English syllable structure, such as unfamiliar consonant clusters, also present difficulties. Finally, there is a general awareness of different orthographic systems, leaving some people uncertain about whether familiar-looking syllables should actually be pronounced as they would be in English.

While this general set of factors results in some names being classified as "difficult," in a given context, individual subjective experience determines which names in particular are found to be "difficult." This becomes clear when we consider criteria for "easy" names. Familiarity with the name's language of origin significantly reduces uncertainty and errors related to pronunciation. Consequently, the set of names from a speaker's repertoire of familiar languages are classified as "easy." For example, one orator taught many Chinese students and made a point of learning how to pronounce Chinese names, including the correct tones. He observed that, over time, he was even able to correctly pronounce Chinese names of students he did not know. Therefore, this English-speaking orator did not find Chinese names difficult, though his colleagues did. Another orator was fluent in German and knew some Spanish and Italian, so he classified names originating from those languages as "easy." One orator grew up in the UK where there was a large Indian population with Punjabi, Gujarati, and Urdu names. He got used to hearing and seeing those names and learned how to pronounce them. He found the Indian names easy to say and reported that even the very long ones gave him no trouble.

Another important factor that leads orators to classify particular names as "easy" is familiarity with the graduate. Names which, on the first encounter, are classified as "difficult" become "easy" after hearing or seeing them repeatedly or having to practice saying them during interactions with students. Like the example above, after years of interacting with students having a certain type of name, one becomes familiar with such names and they are no longer difficult. Of course, this may not always be the case, as individual attitudes toward learning others' names can vary from refusal, to indifference, to eagerness. Thus, subjective experiences play an important role in the development of linguistic ideologies, and these ideologies then influence interactions.

One potential pitfall resulting from familiarity with the language but not with the student occurs when a particular student prefers an Anglicized pronunciation of her name. Does the student pronounce Rizzo with a trilled [r], a tense [i], and a [ts] affricate, as an Italian speaker would? Or does she say it with an Anglicized pronunciation, using an alveolar approximant [ɹ], a lax [ɪ], and a voiced fricative [z]? Orators admitted to sometimes making an error of hypercorrection, pronouncing names according to the phonological rules of the name's language of origin, as they assessed it, when the student's family has used an Anglicized pronunciation for several generations. This kind of error can lead to judgments that the orator is "showing off" or trying too hard to demonstrate linguistic competence. It also marks the name as non-English, which carries connotations of the name-bearer not belonging to mainstream society.

This situation prompts the ideological question of how "correct" pronunciation is determined. Hypercorrect pronunciation emphasizes the idea that names are words and reflects a belief that the "correct" way to pronounce a name is according to the same phonological system for other words in the language of origin. Anglicized pronunciations are considered to be less correct.[3] From a competing ideological perspective, "correct" is determined by the name-bearer: however the person says her own name is the right way to say it. This stems from a belief that names are not merely words, but also a symbolic representation of an individual and that people have the right to determine how they are addressed.

Both of these ideologies contain the assumption that there is only one correct pronunciation of a name. Recent research has shown, however, that it is common for people with non-English names to use or accept alternate pronunciations, depending on who the speakers are and the context. Dechief (2013) describes how Canadian immigrants Anglicize pronunciation of their names as part of "audience-specific identity performance," while Parada (2013) discusses how people in Chicago with Spanish names choose a Spanish, English, or hybrid pronunciation when introducing themselves, according to whether the interlocutor is monolingual or bilingual. My data offers similar findings. For example, one orator reported that a graduate whose last name was Leung said he could say it however was easiest for him. She accepted his first attempt, though he was sure he had not said it the way she would have. The next graduate had the same last name and she told the orator to just pronounce it the same as he had for the first person, to be consistent. Thus, linguistic ideologies centering on names as words may conflict with the ways in which names are used in social interaction.

The example above demonstrates how linguistic ideology works. First, the orator operated from the belief that there is one correct pronunciation for the words and that the graduates should want him to say their names correctly. In contrast, for the two graduates, the priority was not to trouble the professor by insisting on a particular pronunciation, which he may not have been able to achieve. This interpretation is supported by interviews in which several students discussed how they tired of correcting mispronunciations and teaching people how to say their names. They got used to the Anglicized pronunciations and sometimes use them to facilitate interactions, especially in one-time encounters. In these contexts, getting their name right "doesn't matter" because their social identity is irrelevant; the name is only a

reference. Ideologically, what was once valued negatively (an incorrect pronunciation of one's name) becomes acceptable as an adequate name in that multilingual context. When a durable relationship exists between speakers, correct pronunciation retains a high value, prompting more effort to ensure the preferred pronunciation.

Another common strategy for avoiding having to correct or endure mispronunciations is to adopt an English name for use in English-dominant contexts. In the convocation ceremony, an English name or an Anglicized pronunciation is considered by some to be the most appropriate because it matches the English-speaking identity that students have embodied in university activities. When one orator suggested that a Korean student's parents might prefer to hear her Korean name announced, she explained that it was better to use her English name because her parents would get angry if they heard her Korean name pronounced incorrectly at convocation. This example shows that individuals consider both their own preferences and the reactions of others in making choices about their names. These forms of "polyonomastics" (Pina-Cabral, 2010: 298) reflect a dynamic concept of identity, which involves making naming choices for performances of different identities according to shifting linguistic and ethnic contexts.

In the convocation context, linguistic ideologies shape the way names are said in the brief interaction between institution and individual. Reflecting a discourse in which multiculturalism is celebrated, orators make an effort to get the names "right" with the aim of demonstrating that they, on behalf of the university, are respectful, competent speakers. In interview discussions, orators and staff members indicated that people who make an effort to say names correctly are seen as morally superior to those who mispronounce "easy" names, avoid or rename "difficult" names, or do not try to get names right. Following the same ideology, people who insist on non-Anglicized pronunciations of their names are admired for their authenticity and strong connection to an "ethnic" identity, whereas those who use or accept an Anglicized pronunciation are viewed as having weaker cultural ties.

A competing ideology places the burden of interactional work on the name-bearers, rather than on their interlocutors, and leads to opposite evaluations. Some participants described people who adopt an English name or use an Anglicized pronunciation as accommodating and practical, making things "easier" on themselves and others. Those insisting on original pronunciations were described as "difficult," unhelpful, and resistant to assimilation to Canadian society. Through the process of "fractal recursivity" (Irvine and Gal, 2000), ideological representations are produced, which identify certain approaches to name pronunciation with particular identity categories. The opposition between Anglicized and non-Anglicized names is then projected recursively onto other relationships: (easy) Anglicized pronunciations characterize more assimilated, accommodating, helpful people; while (difficult) non-Anglicized pronunciations characterize foreign, resistant, troublesome people.

In choosing which components to include and how they want them pronounced, graduates index themselves as members of certain cultural or linguistic groups, as insiders or outsiders within Anglo-Canadian society, and as accommodating or not. Similarly, orators' pronunciations index their own membership in Anglo-Canadian society, and possibly other ethnolinguistic communities, as well as a respectful identity.

Conclusion: subjectivities in an institutional interaction

In the diverse context of the university, and of Canada more broadly, orators are aware of the possibilities for variation in the pronunciation of almost every name. The university's protocol acknowledges the potential for problems when there is a mismatch between graduates' preferences and orators' pronunciations. Therefore, effort is made to reduce uncertainty and increase the chance of getting the names right. Orators framed the importance of pronouncing names correctly, or at least showing that an attempt is being made, especially at the ceremony, in terms of "respect:" for individual identities, for individual agency and preferences, and for the need to belong by not calling attention to difference. Within the discourse of multiculturalism, difference is treated as normal. Diversity among individuals and groups is expected and celebrated as contributing to the "richness" of everyone's experience. Pronouncing a name with ease marks it as normal, unremarkable, fitting expected patterns.

Ironically at odds with the discourse of respect are practices which, despite intentions to make students feel good by saying their names correctly, call attention to some names as "difficult" and mark their bearers as outsiders. These practices include repeatedly requesting verification, pausing before uttering a name, saying a name haltingly, pronouncing it with a recognizable "ethnic flair" (e.g. emphasizing non-English sounds, intonation, and rhythm), and insisting on saying "real" names instead of assumed English names. Having a name that troubles others contributes to the sense among some students that they do not belong. For them, the verification procedure followed during convocation is not an isolated event, but is part of the accumulated experience of living that "difficult" name and of being treated differently from members of the dominant Anglo-Canadian society.

All universities face the challenge of producing a graduation ceremony that flows well, within a certain time frame, and which demonstrates respect for the graduates. Western's institutional protocol for verification and pronunciation of names aims to achieve this. While both orators and student participants talked about getting names right in terms of showing respect, in most cases, the orators have no way to verify whether their pronunciation was acceptable. In addition to being respectful then, this study indicates that the protocol is also a mechanism for reducing uncertainty among the orators so that they will handle the difficult names well, saying them all confidently and recognizably (if not correctly), and allowing the ceremony to proceed smoothly. The protocol serves the dual objectives of satisfying students, by foregrounding an ideological view of names as symbolic representations of persons, and of adhering to institutional requirements, by emphasizing the linguistic aspects of names as words.

In highlighting the subjective, linguistic aspects of the otherwise formal, institutional act of conferring a degree, this study contributes to our understanding of how linguistic ideologies shape even the briefest interactions between individuals and institutions. I have shown how linguistic ideologies centering on names as words and as symbols for individual persons work in the negotiation of identities between people who say names and those named. This negotiation and the resolution of ambiguities occur behind the scenes, however, while the public performance is designed to present an image of multicultural normality. My investigation of how this image is produced

reveals that, despite efforts to normalize diversity, some students still find themselves singled out because of their names, while others feel obliged to accept alterations or make changes in order to fit in.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] I use the term linguistic ideology consistently here. See Woolard (1998) for a discussion of the synonymous use of language ideology, linguistic ideology, and ideology of language.

[2] I classified components as "English" or "non-English," according to my own subjective evaluations as a native Canadian English speaker. "English" names are familiar and "easy" for monolingual Canadian English speakers to pronounce, while "non-English" names are those which obviously originate from another language and/or which present ambiguity in pronunciation for monolingual English speakers. This classification was only used to get a broad sense of the number of names for which orators might have difficulty in determining a single preferred pronunciation.

[3] See Pina-Cabral (2010) for a related discussion of the ontological weight of "true names" relative to pseudonyms, nicknames, and translations.

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