

# ***Chinese learners' use of 'English' names and what it reveals about ICC***

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# Outline

- ◆ To give a brief overview of the study
- ◆ To discuss relevant aspects for ICC and ELT
- ◆ Gather some feedback on possible directions for further research

# Focus and design

## ◆ Focus of original research:

- Investigate the practice of 'English' name adoption among Chinese students
- Explore its implications on interpersonal / intercultural communication and students' identities

## ◆ Design:

- QUAL-QUAL approach
  - 1) Pair discussion task
  - 2) Semi-structured interviews

# Pair discussion activity:

## Order of **appropriateness**

Pairs (Chinese students or NS tutors) asked to discuss and put the following ten names into order of '**appropriateness**' for use by Chinese students in UK Higher Education:

Sunny

Pooh

Roger

Poppy

Echo

Harry

Dollar

Tower

8

Happiness

# Findings – Mismatch of expectations (e.g. *Poppy*)

## NS tutors

Placed by tutors between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place. A quasi-unanimous view that this was a typical British name.

## Chinese students

Placed by students between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> place.

*“When I see this word, I...the dog come across my mind”*

All confused it with *puppy*, except one group, who realised that it was a flower associated with narcotics in the PRC and thus considered it highly *inappropriate*.

# Findings – Inadvertent positioning (e.g. *Pooh* and *Candy*)

## NS tutors

*“Pooh would be accepted by Chinese because of surname, but it wouldn’t be appropriate in Britain, and yes it might cause potential problems.”*

Referring to the use of names such as ‘Candy’ or ‘Barbie’, one tutor commented:

*“you’re positioning yourself with an identity that people might not take seriously”*

## Chinese students

Students described *Pooh* as sounding unpleasant as it **resembled the sound of spitting**. No mention of its homonym.

# Concern for *positioning* and different *discourse systems*

**Positioning:** *“discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines”* (Davies & Harré, 1999: 37)

- ◆ Some students expressed a preference for avoiding mentioning their nationality if it is not required by the situation:

*“Treat me as a Chinese. If I use my English name, someone would think I’m a Japanese or Korean maybe. But Chinese name...when I use my Chinese name, she can notice that, oh, I am Chinese.”*

*“I just don't want to tell the foreigners I’m a Chinese.”*

**Discourse systems:** an alternative term to ‘culture’, referring to the *“unique ideology, unique forms of discourse, unique patterns of relating, and unique systems for the socialization of its members”*

(Scollon & Scollon, 2012: 113-4)

- ◆ Students face challenges in striking a balance between ‘preservation’ and ‘acculturation’ (Schumann: 1976), by maintaining closeness with their L1 community and also reaching out to the TL community:

*“...for Chinese people, if you are the person who always surrounded by local people, native...foreigners...English people or...they do not like you...They will say that they worship the foreigners, so they feel ashamed for their own culture or something.”*

# Implications for ICC and pedagogy

- ◆ Mismatches of expectations and inadvertent positioning are likely to cause problems in communication (e.g. use of names such as *Pooh* and *Candy*)
- ◆ Pedagogical implications:
  - Equipping students with knowledge of and ability to analyse 'discourse systems' a part of language education?
  - How to do this?
  - Implications for teacher training?
- ◆ Further research: ...*any suggestions?*



# References

- ◆ Davies, B. & R. Harré (1990) 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves'. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1): 44-63.
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- ◆ Scollon, R., Scollon, S. B. K. & Jones, R. H. (2012) *Intercultural communication: a discourse approach*. 3rd ed. Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell.