

It has been the longstanding aim of linguistic anthropology to determine the ways in which language, culture, and society intersect. The study of nicknames can be an excellent window through which to observe these complex interactions, as nicknames reflect the relationship between language and culture in ways which other, more stable elements in a language cannot (Phillips, 1990). This research examines 'soph names', the nicknames given and used by upper-year volunteers (sophs) during freshmen orientation week at the University of Western Ontario. My research considers the names as linguistic and cultural objects and asks the questions: what elements are favoured as names?; how and why do they reference other texts?; and, how do they emerge from and construct social realities? Data for this research has been acquired by electronic survey submitted to members of the sopping community and through linguistic interviews.

Soph nicknames, acquired and discarded annually by the university students who use them, provide insight into the immediate intersection of language and culture, specifically the Canadian youth culture from which they originate. The names work as linguistic objects which index specific cultural references; in the process of nicknaming, cultural elements are valued as positive or negative and these values are transferred to the bearer in a conscious identity construction.

There are approximately 900 sophs from all the different faculties, colleges, residences, etc. at Western. Names are chosen by the peer group and regulated by the governing body of the University Students' Council. They tend to be words or phrases taken from popular cultural references, such as TV shows or product advertisements (e.g. CINDERELLA, WHERE'S WALDO, RING POP, SPOTIFY). They are given to reflect the individual's personality or in reference to a particular incident or activity the individual was involved in. In this way, the names invite others to speculate about some aspect of their personal history or background. A soph's real name is deliberately withheld from the freshmen and not revealed until the end of the orientation week, usually accompanied by an explanation for how he or she got his or her nickname. The naming practises of sophs reflect the power relations between and social identities of individuals within the university community.

Bucholtz & Hall (2005) argue for an interactional approach to identity in which identities emerge, circulate, and gain meaning only in local discourse contexts. As linguistic objects, nicknames carry high levels of pragmatic and semantic information; they often operate as meaningful lexical items as well as functional forms of address. Likewise, nicknames can encompass an untold number of linguistic forms, variations, and references. Beyond the names themselves as linguistic objects, the sopping community engages in interactive speech events which revolve around the names: a soph naming ceremony, acts of shaming for those who reveal the "real names" of sophs during Orientation Week, and a formal "name reveal" ceremony at the end of the week. I predict that these linguistic interactions will also both reflect and construct the social identities and relations between participants.

Work in anthropological linguistics has focused on key theoretical concepts: identity, intertextuality, intersubjectivity, indexicality, performance, and language ideology. The naming practises of the sopping community at the university is an excellent opportunity to examine the occurrence of all these processes.

References

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Phillips, B. (1990). 'Nicknames and sex role stereotypes.' *Sex Roles*, 23: 281-289.