

## What's In a Name?

Level:	Intermediate and above
Length of activity:	30-50 minutes + 10 minute follow-up (next class)
Resources:	Language taken from a novel or movie
Goal:	To raise learners' awareness of naming conventions in English, focussing in particular on the use of first names and surnames

Procedure:

### (1) Brainstorming

- Ask students to consider the differences in calling somebody called John Depp in these three ways: a – Mr Depp b – John c – Depp d – John Depp e - Johnny
- Ask students to put them in order of formality from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>.
- In pairs/groups students should discuss and explain their choices.

### (2) Text analysis

- Give students some text examples such as the following (taken from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*)

[A] Professor Snape to Harry Potter:

*"And a point will be taken from Gryffindor house for your cheek, **Potter**."*

[B] Professor Flitwick to Hermione Granger:

*"Oh, well done! Everyone see her, **Miss Granger's** done it!"*

[C] Seamus Finnigan to Harry Potter:

*"**Harry**, you need your strength. Seekers are always the one who get nobbled by the other team."*

[D] Draco Malfoy to Ron Weasley:

*"You're in luck, **Weasley, Potter's** obviously spotted some money on the ground!"*

[E] Harry Potter meeting Ron Weasley for the first time:

*"I'm **Ron Weasley**," Ron muttered. "**Harry Potter**", said Harry.*

- Ask students to explain the choice of naming form in each of the examples above. They should write notes in the box provided [worksheet\*]. They should try to write rules for the use of each naming type [\*]
- Ask students to match statements 1-5 below with examples A-E above:
  - (1) *First names are often used between friends.* Example: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (2) *Teachers may use Mr/Miss with a student's first name to show respect to that student.* Example: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (3) *When people meet for the first time they often give both their*

*first name and surnames.*

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

(4) *Teachers may use only a student's surname to show power over that student and/or when they are angry with a student.*

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

(5) *The use of only a surname to a peer shows distance from that person rather than friendship.*

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer Key: (1) C (2) B (3) E (4) A (5) D

### **(3) Comparison with own language**

What similarities and differences do you notice between naming systems in English and your first language? Write 50-70 words on this issue [\*]. Do you still have any questions on how to call somebody? If so write your question(s) on the worksheet [\*].

### **(4) Follow-up**

Before the next class the teacher will look through the students' reflection writing and questions. In the next class, the teacher spends 5-10 minutes correcting misunderstandings which may have occurred and answering the most relevant and important questions.

### **(5) Caveats and options**

- It may well be of interest to students to introduce the different usage of Mrs, Miss and Ms: it has become increasingly the case (in both American and British English) that Ms is used in order not to indicate marital status or in cases when marital status is unknown. Certainly, 'Miss' seems to be avoided for unmarried adult women.

### **(6) Rationale**

This task was initially motivated by having many Japanese learners of English calling me by my surname only ("*Fordyce*"). They were surprised to hear that I would find it more polite if they called me by my first name ("*Ken*"). I would then give them the following 'order-of-politeness' rule: (1) *Mr Fordyce*; (2) *Ken*; (3) *Fordyce*. The difference between naming conventions in different languages and cultures is clearly an area which requires raising learners' awareness of general issues rather than providing hard-and-fast rules.

[\*] The worksheet accompanying this activity would be a pdf file on the attached CD-Rom and/or on the related website.

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