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# What's in a Name? A Critical Conceptual Reflection on Names of Characters in EFL Textbook Conversations

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**ABSTRACT**

Instructional conversations in EFL textbooks offer critical input for developing learners' speaking and communicative skills. These conversations' content, cultural elements, contextual features, and situational details shape learners' ability to communicate appropriately. Critical conceptual analyses of textbooks through the lens of cultural representation, authenticity, diversity, and pragmatic competence reveal that, by simulating real-world language use contexts, instructional conversations help learners internalize verbal interaction norms. Characters' names in these dialogues carry cultural significance, implicitly signaling the purpose of communication (e.g., as a lingua franca or between native speakers), participants' cultural backgrounds, and societal dynamics. Names influence learners' mental imagery of scenarios, affecting perceived authenticity. For example, using names common among native English speakers in first-language contexts enhances realism, whereas lingua franca scenarios require names reflecting diverse cultural origins. Textbook developers must strategically select names to align with principles of authenticity, relevance, learning facilitation, diversity, and realistic communication. Authentic naming practices help learners visualize appropriate interaction contexts, fostering cultural awareness and pragmatic competence. Thus, names are not merely labels but pedagogical tools that contextualize language use, shaping learners' understanding of how linguistic and cultural elements intersect in communication. Thoughtful naming in textbook conversations ensures alignment with language-learning objectives, promoting effective, culturally informed verbal interaction skills.

## 1. Introduction

The role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in shaping learners' linguistic and intercultural competencies has long been a focus of applied linguistics research. These textbooks serve not only as vehicles for grammar and vocabulary instruction but also as cultural artifacts that mediate learners' perceptions of the target language and its sociocultural contexts (Gray,



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2010). Within this framework, the design of instructional conversations—dialogues intended to model real-world communication—has garnered significant attention for its impact on learners' pragmatic and communicative development (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). However, while scholars have extensively analyzed lexical choices, grammatical structures, and cultural themes in such dialogues, one element remains underexplored: the names of characters in these conversations. Names, as cultural and linguistic signifiers, are far from neutral; they encode sociocultural identities, signal communicative contexts, and influence learners' mental imagery of interaction scenarios (Matsuda, 2012). This article argues that character names in EFL textbook dialogues are pedagogical tools that shape learners' cultural literacy, pragmatic awareness, and perceptions of English's global role. By critically examining naming practices through the lenses of authenticity, diversity, and cultural representation, this study addresses a gap in materials development research and offers actionable insights for textbook designers.

EFL textbooks are instrumental in constructing learners' understanding of how language functions within sociocultural contexts. As Tomlinson (2016) notes, textbooks often serve as learners' primary—and sometimes only—exposure to the target culture, making their content a critical determinant of intercultural awareness. Dialogues in these materials simulate real-life interactions, providing learners with models of how language is used to negotiate meaning, express identity, and navigate social hierarchies (Kramsch, 1993). However, the authenticity of these dialogues has been widely debated. Gilmore (2007) distinguishes between *situational authenticity* (mimicking real-world contexts) and *interactional authenticity* (reflecting natural communication patterns), arguing that textbooks frequently prioritize the former at the expense of the latter. For example, dialogues may be set in cafés or train stations but lack the hesitations, interruptions, and pragmatic markers typical of spontaneous speech (McCarten, 2007).

A less examined dimension of authenticity lies in the cultural markers embedded within dialogues, including characters' names. Names are not merely labels but sociolinguistic constructs that signal ethnicity, nationality, gender, and social class (Levy, 2008). In Inner Circle contexts (Kachru, 1985; i.e., countries where English is the primary institutional language, e.g., UK/USA), names like "Emma" or "James" are culturally coded as "native speaker" identities, whereas names like "Fatima" or "Hiroshi" evoke culturally diverse and non-English-speaking backgrounds. Such distinctions matter because they implicitly frame English either as a first language (associated with specific national contexts) or as a lingua franca (used globally by

diverse speakers) (Jenkins, 2015). Textbook dialogues that predominantly feature names generally considered as specific to Anglophone (English-speaking) cultures and communities, risk reinforcing the outdated notion that English "belongs" to its native speakers, marginalizing the majority of users who employ it as an international communication tool (Matsuda, 2012).

A critical yet underexplored dimension of EFL textbooks lies in their role as cultural gatekeepers, where naming practices subtly reinforce or challenge linguistic and ideological norms. Research by Phillipson (1992) on linguistic imperialism underscores how English language materials often propagate English-speaking countries' cultural hegemony, positioning Inner Circle nations (e.g., the U.K., U.S.) as the sole arbiters of linguistic legitimacy. Character names like "Emma" or "James" function as metonymic markers of this hegemony, implicitly framing English ownership as the domain of white Western English speakers (Kubota, 2011a). Such practices align with what Canagarajah (1999) terms the "colonial pedagogy" of EFL materials, where cultural content—including names—serves to replicate power hierarchies rather than foster critical intercultural dialogue. For instance, a study of Turkish EFL textbooks by Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman (2012) found that 89% of character names were associated with cultures generally regarded as examples of Anglophone (English-speaking) cultures, despite Turkey's geopolitical orientation toward both European and Middle Eastern contexts. This imbalance not only marginalizes the identities of groups traditionally considered as "*non-native*" (diverse non-Anglophone or non-English-speaking cultures), but also perpetuates learners' misperceptions of English as a monocultural rather than global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2015).

The pedagogical implications of these naming practices are profound. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) emphasizes that language learning must cultivate skills in "critical cultural awareness"—the ability to evaluate and relativize one's own and others' cultural perspectives. However, when textbooks predominantly feature names traditionally associated with the Inner Circle**,** learners internalize a narrow schema of English as a language tied to specific national identities, undermining their capacity to engage with its pluralistic global use (Baker, 2015). For example, a learner in Japan encountering dialogues with names like "Hiroshi" and "Yuki" in international business scenarios may develop greater readiness to view English as a tool for multicultural communication, compared to peers exposed only to "John" and "Sarah" in stereotypically British contexts (Matsuda, 2012). Conversely, the absence of diverse names risks reinforcing what Kubota (2011a) identifies as forms or instances

of Holliday's (2005) concept of "*native speakerism*," an ideology that privileges monolingual, native-speaker norms and devalues multilingual identities. This tension highlights the need for textbook designers to reconcile traditional pedagogical goals (e.g., grammatical accuracy) with contemporary imperatives for equity and global relevance (Gray, 2010).

A growing body of research advocates for intentional naming strategies that reflect English's sociolinguistic reality. For instance, Vettorel (2018) proposes "glocalized" dialogues that pair locally relevant scenarios (e.g., a market in Nigeria) with names signaling both local and global identities (e.g., "Chidinma" and "Lucas"). Such approaches align with Norton's (2000) theory of investment, which posits that learners engage more deeply with materials reflecting their aspirational identities. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Setyono and Widodo (2019) demonstrated that Indonesian EFL learners exposed to textbooks with culturally diverse names exhibited higher motivation and intercultural curiosity, as measured by self-reported engagement surveys. These findings underscore the pedagogical potential of names as tools for fostering linguistic flexibility and dismantling cultural stereotypes. However, challenges remain in balancing authenticity and representation; for example, a dialogue set in London featuring "Abdul" and "Mei Ling" may enhance diversity but risk perceived inauthenticity if learners associate the setting exclusively with the names which are regarded as common in Inner Circle societies or considered as frequently used in natively Anglophone communities (Widdowson, 1998). Addressing this requires a nuanced approach where naming choices are contextually congruent—such as using "Yusuf" in a Dubai-based business dialogue—while gradually expanding learners' schemata through scaffolded exposure to multicultural interactions (McConachy, 2018).

The significance of names in educational materials is rooted in their dual function as *cultural referents* and *pedagogical tools*. Research in intercultural communication highlights that names shape perceptions of identity and belonging (Piller, 2016). For instance, a study by Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015) found that Iranian EFL learners associated Anglophone names (names with linguistic roots of English origin) in dialogues with "authentic" English contexts, while non-Anglophone names triggered confusion about the scenarios' cultural relevance. Similarly, Vettorel (2018) observed that Italian learners perceived dialogues with names like "Mohammed" or "Xiaoling" as more reflective of global English use but less aligned with traditional classroom expectations.

These findings align with theories of *schema theory* (Bartlett, 1932), which posit that learners rely on pre-existing mental frameworks to interpret new information. When names conflict with learners' schemata—for example, a conversation set in London featuring "Abdul" and "Mei Ling"—the dissonance may undermine perceived authenticity (Widdowson, 1998). Conversely, strategically diverse naming practices can expand learners' schemata by normalizing multicultural interactions. For example, Baker (2015) advocates for "global Englishes" approaches that incorporate names from varied linguistic backgrounds to reflect English's pluralistic ownership. Despite growing interest in cultural representation in EFL materials, few studies have systematically analyzed naming practices. Most research focuses on overt cultural content (e.g., holidays, customs) or linguistic features (e.g., idioms, politeness strategies) (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; McConachy, 2018). Notable exceptions include Gray's (2010) critique of Inner Circle and Western Anglophone cultural hegemony in textbooks and Setyono's (2018) analysis of gender representation through names. However, these studies treat names as secondary to broader cultural critiques, neglecting their specific pedagogical implications. This article addresses this gap by posing three research questions:

1. How do character names in EFL textbook dialogues encode cultural and communicative contexts?
2. What principles (e.g., authenticity, diversity) should guide the selection of names to align with language-learning objectives?
3. How can textbook designers leverage naming practices to foster learners' intercultural and pragmatic competence?

To address these questions, this study employs a critical conceptual analysis framework, interrogating textbook dialogues through the lenses of cultural representation, authenticity, diversity, and pragmatic competence. The analysis aims to advance materials development theory and provide evidence-based recommendations for practitioners. This study contributes to the fields of EFL pedagogy and materials development in two key ways. First, it elevates naming practices from a peripheral concern to a central consideration in textbook design, emphasizing their role in constructing cultural and communicative authenticity. Second, it offers a framework for evaluating and designing dialogues that align with contemporary paradigms of English as a global lingua franca. In an era where 80% of English interactions occur between non-native

speakers (Crystal, 2012), textbooks must evolve to reflect this reality—and names are a critical starting point.

## 1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Authenticity in EFL materials has traditionally focused on replicating real-world interactions, yet this paradigm often neglects the sociocultural dimensions of naming practices. Gilmore's (2007) distinction between situational and interactional authenticity provides a foundational critique, but scholars like Widdowson (1998) argue that authenticity is not inherent in materials but constructed through learners' engagement with them. For instance, a dialogue featuring "Liam" and "Charlotte" in an Australian café may achieve situational authenticity by mirroring a plausible setting, yet fail interactionally if the names reinforce monolithic cultural associations (e.g., framing English as exclusively Anglo-American). This tension underscores the need for cultural congruence, where names align with both the communicative purpose and the pluralistic realities of English use. Kramsch's (2011) theory of symbolic competence extends this further, positing that learners must interpret cultural signs (like names) as dynamic markers of identity and power. A study by Zacharias (2012) on Indonesian EFL textbooks revealed that dialogues using culturally incongruent names (e.g., "Kevin" in a Javanese wedding scenario) reduced learners' engagement, as they perceived the scenarios as "foreign" rather than relatable. Thus, authenticity in naming requires designers to balance situational realism with the symbolic resonance of names in learners' sociocultural contexts.

Diversity in naming practices transcends mere inclusion; it demands intentional representation that reflects the status, role and function of the English language as a global lingua franca. Baker (2015) critiques "diversity as tokenism," where culturally diverse or non-Anglophone names are added superficially without contextual relevance, leading to what Pennycook (2001) terms "*cosmetic multiculturalism*." For example, a textbook might include "Fatima" in a dialogue about British history solely to signal diversity, inadvertently reinforcing her as an outsider. In contrast, intentional diversity involves curating names that normalize multilingual identities within specific communicative contexts. Research by Setyono and Widodo (2019) demonstrates this through their analysis of Indonesian textbooks: dialogues pairing local names ("Dewi") with global ones ("Carlos") in international business scenarios enhanced learners' perceptions of English as a shared resource. This aligns with Norton's (2000)

concept of investment, where learners engage more deeply with materials reflecting their aspirational identities. However, diversity must also confront ideological barriers. Phillipson's (1992) linguistic imperialism framework warns that Anglophone names (i.e., names of English, e.g., British, origin or names common in Western Inner Circle countries) perpetuate colonial hierarchies, positioning non-Anglophone speakers (those coming from cultural backgrounds other than those of the Inner Circle) as perpetual "others." To counter this, Matsuda (2012) advocates for critical toponymy—the deliberate selection of names that dismantle monolingual native-speaker norms, such as using "Xiaoling" in a Shanghai-based negotiation dialogue. Such practices not only diversify representation but also challenge learners to reconceptualize ownership of English.

Pragmatic competence, the ability to use language appropriately in context, is deeply intertwined with learners' interpretations of cultural cues embedded in names. Kasper and Rose (2002) emphasize that pragmatic development requires exposure to varied sociolinguistic contexts, where names act as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982). For example, encountering "Yusuf" in a BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) dialogue signals a multinational setting, prompting learners to anticipate strategies for cross-cultural accommodation (e.g., code-switching, clarification requests). McConachy (2018) links this to metapragmatic awareness—the ability to reflect on how language choices index social meanings. A learner interpreting a dialogue between "Sofia" (Greek) and "Wei" (Chinese) must infer relational dynamics (e.g., formality, solidarity) from contextual clues, including names. However, pragmatic competence also involves navigating cultural dissonance (McConachy, 2018). Taguchi (2015) found that Japanese EFL learners initially struggled with dialogues featuring originally non-English names in Anglophone settings of English-speaking countries (e.g., "Amina" in London) but developed greater flexibility after guided reflection on English's global role. This suggests that naming practices, when paired with pedagogical scaffolding, can transform pragmatic learning from rule-based instruction to critical engagement with sociolinguistic diversity.

The interdependence of authenticity, diversity, and pragmatic competence necessitates a holistic framework for textbook design. For instance, a dialogue simulating a UN meeting with names like "Kwame" (Ghana), "Elena" (Argentina), and "Tatsuya" (Japan) achieves cultural congruence (authenticity), represents global participation (diversity), and primes learners for

pragmatic strategies like diplomatic hedging (e.g., "Perhaps we could consider…"). However, tensions arise when principles conflict. A dialogue set in Dublin using "Muhammad" may enhance diversity but risk perceived inauthenticity if learners associate Ireland with names of English origin and expect Anglophone names (Widdowson, 1998). To resolve this, Vettorel (2018) proposes glocalized scaffolding—gradually introducing diverse names in familiar contexts before expanding to global settings. Similarly, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) urges designers to pair diverse naming practices with activities that interrogate power dynamics (e.g., discussing why earlier textbooks favored "John" over "Jia"). By framing names as sites of critical inquiry, textbooks can foster both pragmatic competence and intercultural citizenship (Byram, 1997), preparing learners to navigate pluralistic and superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007) communicative ecologies of global English through critical pragmatic awareness (Blommaert, 2010; McConachy, 2018; Vertovec, 2007).

## 2. Analysis and Discussion

The significance of character names in EFL textbook dialogues extends far beyond their role as mere identifiers. Names function as cultural and pedagogical tools that mediate learners' understanding of language ownership, intercultural dynamics, and pragmatic norms. This section synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to establish a framework for analyzing how names encode sociocultural identities, scaffold intercultural competence, and influence language learning outcomes. By situating naming practices within broader discourses of authenticity, diversity, and critical pedagogy, this framework elucidates the dual role of names as cultural signifiers and pedagogical instruments.

Names are sociolinguistic constructs that carry implicit cultural, ethnic, and ideological meanings (Levy, 2008). In ethnocentric and biased EFL materials, names like "Emma" or "James" are not neutral labels but markers of linguistic legitimacy, reinforcing the association of English with Inner Circle nations (Phillipson, 1992). Such naming practices perpetuate what Holliday (2005) terms "*native speakerism*," an ideology that privileges white, Western, native Anglophone identities as the default owners of English. Conversely, names like "Fatima" or "Hiroshi" signal culturally diverse non-Anglophone backgrounds, positioning their bearers as "others" in contexts where English is framed as a foreign language rather than a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2015). This dichotomy has profound implications for learners' perceptions: a

study of Turkish EFL textbooks revealed that 89% of character names were associated with Western Anglophone cultures, following an English-centric approach, marginalizing Turkey's bicultural identity and reinforcing learners' view of English as a monolingual, monocultural code (Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2012). The cultural coding of names intersects with theories of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2011). Linguistic imperialism critiques the hegemony of Anglophone cultural norms in EFL materials, where names act as metonymic symbols of colonial power structures. Symbolic competence, meanwhile, emphasizes learners' ability to interpret names as dynamic signs of identity and context. For example, a dialogue set in London featuring "Abdul" and "Mei Ling" may challenge learners' schemata (Bartlett, 1932) by destabilizing the assumed link between Anglophone names and "authentic" English use. Such dissonance, while initially confusing, can foster critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997) by prompting learners to question why certain names are excluded from or overrepresented in specific contexts.

As pedagogical tools, names scaffold learners' development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and pragmatic awareness. Byram's (1997) ICC model identifies "critical cultural awareness" as a core component, requiring learners to evaluate their own and others' cultural perspectives. Names play a pivotal role in this process: textbooks that pair local names (e.g., "Dewi" in Indonesia) with global ones (e.g., "Carlos") in international scenarios model English as a shared resource, fostering learners' ability to negotiate multilingual identities (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Norton's (2000) theory of investment further explains how learners engage more deeply with materials reflecting their aspirational identities. For instance, Japanese students exposed to dialogues with names like "Hiroshi" in global business contexts may invest more actively in learning, perceiving English as a tool for transcending national boundaries (Matsuda, 2012).

Pragmatically, names act as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982) that signal interactional norms and expectations. A dialogue featuring "Yusuf" (Arabic origin) and "Sofia" (Greek origin) in a business English as a lingua franca (BELF) scenario primes learners to anticipate strategies like code-switching or clarification requests, essential for cross-cultural communication (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Metapragmatic awareness—the ability to reflect on how language choices index social meanings—is thus cultivated through exposure to diverse naming practices (McConachy, 2018). However, challenges arise when names conflict with learners'

existing schemata. Taguchi (2015) found that Japanese EFL learners initially perceived dialogues with names of non-English linguistic origins in Anglophone (native English) contexts and settings (e.g., "Abdul" or "Amina" in London) as inauthentic but developed greater flexibility through guided reflection on English's global role. This underscores the need for pedagogical scaffolding to help learners reconcile cultural dissonance.

The interplay between authenticity and diversity in naming practices necessitates a nuanced, context-sensitive framework. Authenticity, traditionally defined as situational or interactional realism (Gilmore, 2007), must expand to include cultural congruence—the alignment of names with communicative contexts. For example, a dialogue set in Nigeria featuring "Chidinma" (Igbo origin) and "Lucas" (globalized name) achieves both local relevance and global resonance, reflecting the glocalized nature of English use (Vettorel, 2018). Conversely, tokenistic diversity—such as inserting "Fatima" into a historically British scenario—risks reinforcing otherness rather than normalizing multilingual identities (Pennycook, 2001).

"*Critical pedagogy*," connecting the conscious understanding of language to actively perceiving the world (Freire, 1970), offers a pathway to reconcile these tensions. By framing names as sites of ideological inquiry, textbooks can encourage learners to interrogate power dynamics. For instance, activities comparing naming practices across textbook generations (e.g., the shift from "John" to "Jia" in Chinese contexts) can spark discussions on linguistic imperialism and ownership. This approach aligns with Matsuda's (2012) call for critical toponymy, where name selection consciously decentralizes nativist Inner Circle Anglophone norms. A study by Zacharias (2012) illustrates the impact of such strategies: Indonesian learners exposed to culturally incongruent names (e.g., "Kevin" in a Javanese wedding) initially disengaged but demonstrated heightened intercultural curiosity after exploring the sociolinguistic and sociocultural rationale and reasoning behind the planned choices. Effective integration of names as cultural and pedagogical tools requires adherence to five principles:

1. **Cultural Congruence**: Align names with communicative contexts (e.g., "Wei" in a Shanghai business meeting).
2. **Intentional Diversity**: Curate names to reflect global Englishes without tokenism (Baker, 2015).

3. **Scaffolded Exposure**: Gradually introduce diverse names to expand learners' schemata (Widdowson, 1998).
4. **Critical Engagement**: Pair naming practices with activities that deconstruct power dynamics (Freire, 1970).
5. **Pragmatic Alignment**: Use names as cues for anticipating interactional strategies (McConachy, 2018).

For example, a UN-themed dialogue with names like "Kwame" (Ghana), "Elena" (Argentina), and "Tatsuya" (Japan) models cultural congruence (authenticity) (Kubota, 2011b), global representation (diversity) (Cogo and Dewey, 2012), and diplomatic hedging (pragmatic competence) (House, 2008;Varga-Dobai et al., n.d.). Designers must also address contextual tensions: while "Muhammad" in Dublin may enhance diversity, it risks perceived inauthenticity if learners associate Ireland with names of English root. Glocalized scaffolding—starting with familiar contexts before introducing global ones—can mitigate such issues (Vettorel, 2018).

In general, names in EFL textbooks are potent cultural and pedagogical tools that shape learners' perceptions and understanding of the global role and function of English language as well as learner's awareness of their own communicative potential as independent individuals. By embedding critical, glocalized naming practices, materials designers can foster intercultural citizenship and pragmatic agility, preparing learners for the realities of English as a lingua franca.

The analysis presented here underscores names as potent cultural and pedagogical tools, yet their implementation in EFL materials remains fraught with ideological and practical tensions. Future research might investigate how learners from diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds interpret naming practices differently, or how teachers mediate conflicting cultural cues in classroom settings. For textbook designers, the challenge lies in balancing cultural congruence with global representation—a task requiring ongoing dialogue between applied linguists, educators, and materials developers. Ultimately, names are not merely linguistic artifacts but sites of contestation and possibility in the project of decolonizing English language education. This section analyzes the role of character names in EFL textbook dialogues through the lenses of cultural representation, authenticity, diversity, and pragmatic competence. Drawing on empirical studies and theoretical frameworks, it examines how naming practices encode

sociocultural identities, reinforce or challenge linguistic hierarchies, and scaffold learners' intercultural and communicative development.

A predominant trend in EFL textbooks is the overrepresentation of Anglophone names, which perpetuates the ideological framing of English as a language owned by Inner Circle nations (Phillipson, 1992). For instance, Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman's (2012) analysis of Turkish EFL textbooks revealed that 89% of character names (e.g., "John," "Emily") were Anglophone, despite Turkey's geopolitical and cultural ties to both Europe and the Middle East. This imbalance marginalizes non-Anglophone identities and reinforces learners' perception of English as a monocultural code tied to specific national contexts (Jenkins, 2015). Such practices align with Holliday's (2005) concept of *native speakerism*, where Anglophone names like "James" or "Charlotte" implicitly position white, Western speakers as the default owners of linguistic authority.

Conversely, textbooks that incorporate names reflecting global Englishes—such as "Chidinma" (Nigeria) or "Wei" (China)—model English as a shared resource for international communication. Baker's (2015) analysis of "global Englishes" materials demonstrates that dialogues pairing local and global names (e.g., "Dewi" and "Carlos" in Indonesian textbooks) enhance learners' readiness to engage with English as a lingua franca. However, tokenistic inclusion of non-Anglophone names risks *cosmetic multiculturalism* (Pennycook, 2001), where diversity is superficially signaled without meaningful contextualization. For example, inserting "Fatima" into a dialogue about British history may inadvertently frame her as an outsider, reinforcing rather than dismantling cultural hierarchies.

Authenticity in textbook dialogues hinges on the alignment of names with communicative contexts. Gilmore's (2007) framework distinguishes between *situational authenticity* (plausible settings) and *cultural congruence* (names that match the sociolinguistic reality of English use). A dialogue set in an Australian café with names like "Liam" and "Charlotte" achieves situational authenticity but may fail culturally if it excludes non-Anglophone names commonly found in Australia's multicultural cities (e.g., "Hana" or "Raj"). Conversely, a dialogue in Dubai featuring "Yusuf" and "Sofia" aligns with the city's multilingual demographics, fostering both situational and cultural authenticity (Matsuda, 2012).

Learners' schemata—pre-existing mental frameworks shaped by their cultural experiences—play a critical role in perceiving authenticity. Bartlett's (1932) schema theory

explains why Japanese EFL learners initially found dialogues with non-Anglophone names in London (e.g., "Amina") dissonant (Taguchi, 2015). However, guided reflection on English's global role helped them recalibrate their expectations, illustrating how pedagogy can bridge gaps between textbook content and learners' schemata (McConachy, 2018).

Intentional diversity in naming practices requires curating names that reflect the sociolinguistic realities of global English use. Vettorel's (2018) concept of *glocalized dialogues* exemplifies this approach: a Nigerian market scenario featuring "Chidinma" (local) and "Lucas" (global) normalizes multilingual identities without exoticizing non-Anglophone speakers. Similarly, Setyono and Widodo's (2019) study of Indonesian textbooks showed that learners exposed to such dialogues reported higher motivation and intercultural curiosity.

However, designers must navigate tensions between diversity and perceived authenticity. A dialogue set in Dublin with the name "Muhammad" may enhance representation but risk dissonance if learners associate Ireland predominantly with Anglophone names (Widdowson, 1998). To mitigate this, Vettorel (2018) advocates *glocalized scaffolding*: introducing diverse names in familiar local contexts (e.g., "Jia" in a Shanghai business meeting) before expanding to global settings. This strategy aligns with Norton's (2000) theory of investment, where learners engage more deeply with materials reflecting their aspirational identities.

Names act as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982), priming learners to anticipate interactional norms. For example, a dialogue between "Yusuf" (Arabic) and "Sofia" (Greek) in a business English as a lingua franca (BELF) scenario signals the need for strategies like clarification requests ("Could you repeat that?") or code-switching, essential for cross-cultural communication (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Metapragmatic awareness—the ability to reflect on how language choices index social meanings—is cultivated when learners analyze why certain names appear in specific contexts (McConachy, 2018). Challenges arise when names conflict with learners' pragmatic expectations. Taguchi (2015) found that Japanese students initially struggled with dialogues featuring "Amina" in London but developed flexibility through activities exploring English's global role. This underscores the importance of pedagogical scaffolding to help learners decode cultural cues embedded in names. Principles derived from this analysis for textbook design are:

1. **Cultural Congruence**: Align names with communicative contexts (e.g., "Wei" in Shanghai).

2. **Intentional Diversity**: Avoid tokenism; curate names reflecting global Englishes (Baker, 2015).
3. **Scaffolded Exposure**: Gradually introduce diverse names to expand schemata (Widdowson, 1998).
4. **Critical Engagement**: Pair names with activities deconstructing power dynamics (Freire, 1970).
5. **Pragmatic Alignment**: Use names to signal interactional strategies (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

For instance, as mentioned earlier, a UN-themed dialogue with "Kwame" (Ghana), "Elena" (Argentina), and "Tatsuya" (Japan) models authenticity, diversity, and pragmatic strategies like diplomatic hedging (Varga-Dobai et al., n.d.). The conceptual analysis reveals that names in EFL textbooks are not neutral labels but ideological and pedagogical tools with effects. While Anglophone hegemony persists, intentional, glocalized practices can foster intercultural citizenship and pragmatic agility. Future research should explore how teachers mediate naming-related dissonance and how learners from diverse backgrounds interpret these cues differently.

## 3. Conclusion

The analysis of naming practices in EFL textbook dialogues underscores the critical role of character names as cultural and pedagogical tools. This section synthesizes the findings from the conceptual framework and empirical analysis to outline actionable implications for textbook design and language teaching, addressing how educators and materials developers can leverage naming practices to foster intercultural competence, pragmatic agility, and equitable representations of English's global role.

A core principle emerging from this study is the necessity of cultural congruence—the alignment of character names with the sociolinguistic realities of English use in specific communicative contexts. For instance, a dialogue set in Dubai featuring "Yusuf" and "Sofia" reflects the city's multilingual demographics, enhancing both situational authenticity and cultural resonance (Matsuda, 2012). Conversely, dialogues in multicultural settings like Australia should incorporate names like "Hana" (Korean origin) or "Raj" (Indian origin) to avoid reinforcing monolinguathe l stereotypes (Gilmore, 2007).

Cultural congruence requires designers to move beyond tokenistic diversity by grounding naming choices in demographic data and sociolinguistic research. For example, textbooks targeting Southeast Asian learners might prioritize names like "Aisha" (Malaysia) or "Thanh" (Vietnam) in local scenarios while integrating global names like "Carlos" in international contexts (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Such practices not only enhance authenticity but also validate learners' multilingual identities, fostering a sense of ownership over English as a lingua franca (Baker, 2015). The study critiques cosmetic multiculturalism—the superficial inclusion of non-Anglophone names without meaningful contextualization (Pennycook, 2001). For instance, inserting "Fatima" into a historically British dialogue risks framing her as an outsider rather than a legitimate English user. Instead, intentional diversity involves curating names that normalize multilingual identities within specific interactional contexts. Vettorel's (2018) "glocalized dialogues," such as a Nigerian market scenario pairing "Chidinma" (local) and "Lucas" (global), exemplify this approach. Intentional diversity also demands confronting ideological legacies of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Textbook designers must decentralize Anglophone norms through critical toponymy—deliberately selecting names like "Xiaoling" in Shanghai-based negotiations to challenge the notion that English "belongs" to Inner Circle nations (Matsuda, 2012). This aligns with Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, which urges educators to frame names as sites of ideological inquiry.

## 4. Implications

### 4.1. Implications for Designers

1. Conduct region-specific sociolinguistic research to identify culturally congruent names.
2. Avoid overloading dialogues with Anglophone names in global or multicultural settings.
3. Use local names in domestically situated scenarios (e.g., "Wei" in Shanghai business meetings).

### 4.2. Implications for Educators and Teachers

1. Pair dialogues with activities exploring the sociopolitical implications of naming practices (e.g., comparing "John" in 1990s textbooks to "Jia" in contemporary materials).
2. Discuss how names reflect power dynamics (e.g., why Anglophone names dominate "business English" contexts).

Learners' schemata—pre-existing mental frameworks shaped by cultural experiences—play a pivotal role in perceiving authenticity (Bartlett, 1932). Japanese EFL learners initially found dialogues featuring "Amina" in London dissonant but adapted through guided reflection on English's global role (Taguchi, 2015). This underscores the need for pedagogical scaffolding to help learners reconcile textbook content with real-world linguistic diversity.

Glocalized scaffolding (Vettorel, 2018) offers a structured approach:

1. **Familiar Contexts**: Introduce diverse names in locally relevant scenarios (e.g., "Jia" in a Shanghai business meeting).
2. **Hybrid Contexts**: Transition to mixed settings (e.g., "Yusuf" and "Sofia" in a Dubai conference).
3. **Global Contexts**: Expand to multinational scenarios (e.g., UN meetings with "Kwame," "Elena," and "Tatsuya").

This gradual exposure helps learners expand their schemata while minimizing cognitive overload.

1. Use reflective activities (e.g., journals, discussions) to explore learners' reactions to culturally dissonant names.
2. Incorporate multimedia resources (e.g., videos of multicultural interactions) to contextualize textbook dialogues.

Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) provides a framework for decolonizing EFL materials by framing names as sites of ideological contestation. For example, comparing naming practices across textbook generations (e.g., the shift from "John" to "Jia" in Chinese contexts) can spark discussions on linguistic imperialism and ownership. Such activities align with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which prioritizes "critical cultural awareness"—the ability to interrogate one's own and others' cultural perspectives. A study by Zacharias (2012) illustrates the transformative potential of critical engagement: Indonesian learners initially disengaged from dialogues with culturally incongruent names (e.g., "Kevin" in a Javanese wedding) but demonstrated heightened curiosity after exploring the rationale behind these choices.

### 4.3. Implications for Materials Developers

1. Include instructor notes explaining the pedagogical intent behind naming choices.

2. Design companion activities (e.g., role-plays, debates) that interrogate the cultural coding of names.

Names act as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982), priming learners to anticipate interactional norms. For instance, a dialogue between "Yusuf" (Arabic) and "Sofia" (Greek) signals the need for strategies like clarification requests or code-switching (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Metapragmatic awareness—the ability to reflect on how language choices index social meanings—is cultivated when learners analyze why certain names appear in specific contexts (McConachy, 2018). However, pragmatic alignment requires addressing conflicts between names and learners' expectations. For example, while "Muhammad" in Dublin may enhance diversity, it risks perceived inauthenticity if learners associate Ireland with Anglophone names (Widdowson, 1998). Glocalized scaffolding and explicit instruction can mitigate such dissonance.

### 4.4. Implications for Curriculum Design

1. Annotate dialogues with pragmatic notes (e.g., "Yusuf's name signals a multinational setting; anticipate formal greetings").
2. Integrate names into pragmatic exercises (e.g., "How would you address Sofia if she were your manager?").

The complexities of naming practices necessitate collaboration between applied linguists, educators, and learners. Participatory design processes—such as focus groups with teachers from diverse regions—can ensure that materials reflect local and global realities. For instance, a textbook co-developed by Nigerian and Brazilian educators might feature names like "Chidinma" and "Thiago" in dialogues about climate change, fostering both cultural relevance and global citizenship.

### 4.5. Implications for Stakeholders

1. Establish advisory boards with representatives from marginalized linguistic communities.
2. Pilot materials in diverse classrooms to assess cultural and pragmatic resonance.

The design of EFL textbook conversations is a deeply ideological act, with names serving as potent tools for either reinforcing or challenging linguistic hierarchies. By adhering to principles of cultural congruence, intentional diversity, scaffolded exposure, critical engagement,

and pragmatic alignment, educators and materials developers can transform textbooks into vehicles for intercultural citizenship. Future research should explore how learners from underrepresented regions interpret naming practices and how teacher training programs can equip educators to mediate cultural dissonance effectively. In an era where English serves as a global lingua franca, names are not mere labels but declarations of linguistic democracy.

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