

# LEDIR

Linguistics Equity Diversity and Inclusion Repository

## The Diverse Names Database: A Tool for Creating More Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Linguistic Example Sentences

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# JEDI and linguistic example sentences

- ◆ Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) are important considerations in linguistics that we cannot morally ignore; language-based biases pervade society in many harmful ways, especially in education<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ In addition to representing a main source of data in linguistic research within various sub-fields, example sentences are a core vehicle for linguists in teaching a wide range of phenomena to our students
  - It's well-established that linguistic examples often reflect and reinforce unjust hierarchies and stereotypes, such as those concerning gender and culture, especially when it comes to the choice of names<sup>2</sup>
  - In this talk, we present a tool that can support linguists in addressing this particular concern

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher 1983, Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011, Kohli and Solórzano 2012, Lippi-Green 2012, Flores and Rosa 2015, Blundon 2016, Bucholtz 2016, Russell et al. 2018, Cochran 2019, McMaster 2020, *inter alia*; and as explicitly noted in various calls to action specifically targeting linguists, such as Rickford and King 2016, Leonard 2018, Conrod 2019, Charity Hudley 2020 and Sanders et al. 2020, *inter alia*.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., Macaulay and Brice 1997, Pabst et al. 2018, Richy and Burnett 2019, Kotek et al. 2020, 2021.

# The Diverse Names Database (DND)

- ◆ 78 names across the three gender classifications, representing 30+ language families and 110+ countries:

*Figure 1: Sample entries from the Diverse Names Database*

All-gender		Feminine-leaning		Masculine-leaning	
Amal	Arabic	Anahera	Māori	Aimo	Finnish
Bounmy	Lao	Boróka	Hungarian	Baber	Urdu
Cahyo	Javanese	Chana	Hebrew	Carlu	Corsican
⋮		⋮		⋮	
Xquenda	Zapotec	Xulia	Galician	Xuan	Asturian
Yunuen	Purépecha	Yolotl	Nahuatl	Yama	Pashto
Zhyrgal	Kirghiz	Zuriñe	Basque	Zaharia	Romanian

# Additional issues and considerations

- ◈ While the DND presents opportunities for greater inclusiveness and affirmation (both in terms of gender and cultural representation), it also raises additional issues that linguists should be mindful of
  - On the one hand, not relying on names that depend on English phonotactics is important for unsettling the default status of English in our classrooms beyond its use as the language of instruction (when applicable)
  - But on the other, the inclusion of names that are not easily assimilated to English pronunciations may elicit overt commentary or mispronunciations that can be distressing for students to overhear

# Conclusion

- ◆ The DND is therefore not the be-all, end-all of linguistic diversity and inclusion; rather, it is one tool to incorporate in changing the underlying structures of our teaching, and part of a larger process of deconstructing how we teach linguistics
  - In the classroom, linguists may not realize that they are relying on their own biases in coming up with examples
- ◆ If we do not actively work to combat linguistic discrimination, we are helping to perpetuate it





# Thank you!

- ◆ We are grateful to the following audiences for their enthusiasm and feedback on this project throughout its various stages: TULCON 13; Canadian Linguistic Association 2020; the Linguistic Society of America webinar series on Racial Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Linguistics Curriculum; the UofT Faculty of Arts & Science Teaching & Learning Community of Practice; and SALT(ED) 2021, especially Scott AnderBois, Lucas Champollion, Maura O'Leary, Ai Tanaguchi, and Eytan Zweig
- ◆ We are also indebted to the many friends and colleagues who gave us name judgements and recommendations, especially Kazuya Bamba, Çağrı Bilgin, Radu Craioveanu, Myrto Grigoroglou, Atiqa Hachimi, Daphna Heller, Thuy Huynh, Peter Jurgec, Yoonjung Kang, Angelika Kiss, Will Oxford, Pedro Mateo Pedro, Keren Rice, Sahar Taghipour, Talia Tahtadjian, and Pocholo Umbal
- ◆ The full database will be available soon on the Linguistics Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Repository (LEDIR), where we are also hosting all of the other materials we have developed in our larger project.

<http://ledir.ling.utoronto.ca>

- ◆ LEDIR itself is currently live, though still in early development. Please check it out and reach out if you have any suggestions!

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