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ENG 110: Writing and Rhetoric
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The earliest days of my childhood were spent speaking Urdu. English was never introduced until later, when I first attended Pre-School. *Ami* was always strict about what language was spoken at home. I remember the fierce look in her eyes if I accidentally spoke to her in English. Her eyes would widen, pupils would dilate, until they were a speck compared to the exterior of her eye. In an act of resistance, she'd say "*Ghar me siraf Urdu bolo mere sath* (At home, only speak to me in Urdu)." We had this conversation a number of times following the course of my life. I couldn't see it then, but I now know that my *Ami*, born and raised in Pakistan, was distressed at the thought of losing her roots.

Soon, I developed a habit of speaking Urdu at home and English at school—a clear distinction made between what was personal and what was professional at a young age. This applied not only to my language but to my name too. At home, everyone called me عائشة (*eye-shuh*), but at school they called me Ayesha (*eye-e-shuh*). Though my parents and teachers spelled my name the same, the one letter difference in pronunciation also became a factor of my two identities. I distinctly recall a time in the 8th grade, where for the first time in my life at school someone had called me Ayesha, the way it was said at home. Even other Pakistani students, who spoke the same language as me, had mothers, sisters, and cousins with the same name, didn't use the correct pronunciation. At first it felt like an offense, he was crossing a line I had put years into understanding and then establishing. But the more I spoke to this person, the more I heard them say my name, the more I realized that it was gratifying to be called the name that felt like me, made me, me.



Before highschool started, I decided I wanted to rid myself of this identity crisis, choosing to never introduce myself as *eye-e-shuh* again. I would gain the confidence to correct someone if I had to. I didn't want to feel like two different people. This had become about authority. Who had authority over my name? Why couldn't it be pronounced the way it was given to me? Growing up in the United States, I was accustomed to people mispronouncing and anglicizing the names of people who shared the same religious or cultural background as me. Historically, these people were accustomed to shortening their names, or completely replaced them with white names to avoid racist remarks. The effort to acknowledge western and European names was always present, but never for Muslim or Asian names. When Hasan Minhaj went on The Ellen Show, he corrected her mispronunciation of his name, and went on to compare it to names people easily pronounce like Higsby Witherthrottle or Timothée Chalamet.

Putting an effort to pronounce someone's name demonstrates a level of respect and value. I wanted people to respect me and my cultural background when they would address me. Our names are how we identify ourselves, if we are made to brush them off into shorter westernized versions, we're minimizing our own identities. The lack of attention to how these names might be pronounced is disrespectful. Being inclusive and sensitive to others culture is crucial to making people feel comfortable and welcome in environments like school. Alienating names and pronouncing anglicized versions of them is embarrassing for children who grow up living a

double life. In order to value diversity and represent all people, we need to make an effort to show that we care when communicating with and addressing them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t3YhWQppAw>