

The Rotary Call Name -- First Name or Nickname

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian) 1 August 2025



It is very common, whenever you are going to fill in the registration form for convention or conference, you will be required to: *“Enter your name as you wish it to appear on your convention badge. Please mark your Rotary call name (Nickname) in the space provided.”* From the earliest days of Rotary, members have referred to each other on a first-name basis as the call name in the Club. Since personal acquaintanceship and friendship are cornerstones of Rotary, it was named that many clubs adopted the practice of setting aside formal titles in conversations among members. Individuals who normally would be addressed as Doctor, Mister, Professor, the Honourable, Sir, or even CP, PP, etc., are regularly called Joe, Bob, Mary, Karen, or Charlie by other Rotarians. The characteristic Rotary Club name badge fosters the first-name custom. However, the first-name or nickname custom is not a ritualistic custom of Rotary, for Rotary has no ritualistic customs. It is simply a practice that spontaneously developed in break down the reserves that stand in the way of fellowship. In April 1926, Chesley R. Perry, the first Rotary International Secretary gave an elaboration of *《Rotary and First Names》* on *《The Rotarian》* Magazine. Readers may find the full text on the next page.

When Rotary was a fledgling, and its handful of members virtual strangers to one another, any effort at breaking down formality was welcomed. Thus it seemed natural that the early members called each other by the first name, but it may be various in different races of culture. In 1980, when U.S. journalist Sydney J. Harris addressed the subject of the first-name custom in his syndicated newspaper column, *《The Rotarian》* Magazine editor sent copies of his remarks to Rotarians in several countries, asking for their comments on it and on the first-name custom in general. Reprint of Mr. Harris column and the Rotarians’ replies are shown here on the annex pages 3-6.

In a few areas, such as Europe, Club members use a more formal style in addressing fellow members. In other parts of the world, mainly in Asia, for example in Taiwan, the practice is to assign each new Rotarian a humorous nickname that relates to some personal characteristic or describes the member’s business or profession. For example, a member nicknamed “Oxygen” is the manufacturer of chemical gas products, while “Shoes” might be the nickname for a Rotarian in the footwear business. Other members might carry nicknames like “Muscles,” “Foghorn,” or “Smiles” as commentaries on their physical characteristics. (Read more about in the Chinese text on Pages 7-8.)

In the early days, the Chinese, Japanese or Korean would consider addressing a man by his nickname as somewhat coarse and of questionable taste. Nevertheless, as they understood the philosophical and psychological bases of Rotary, they realized in cultivating fellowship, informality has a legitimate place. Confucius, it is true, taught politeness and courtesy. But he also said: *“Keep a person afar from you through obeisance.”* Surely good fellowship is far more important than ceremonious etiquette. The nicknames are frequently a source of good-natured fun and fellowship. But whether a Rotarian is addressed by a given first-name or a nickname, the spirit of personal friendship is the initial step that opens doors to all other opportunities for service.

This Month's Editorial

Rotary and First Names

By Chesley R. Perry

THE use of the first name in conversation between Rotarians is very common in the United States, and the habit is not at all uncommon among Rotarians in other countries. There is no reference to it in the Constitution or By-Laws of Rotary International, nor is it an unwritten law or an obligatory custom. In Rotary we are supposed to become so well acquainted with each other—so friendly—so intimate—that we naturally use our fellow-Rotarian's first name. That is all there is to it.

Not so very long ago an alert American Rotarian made a point of the fact that President Donald A. Adams was referred to as "Mr. Adams" in something which I had written. The situation called for an explanation from me, which was in substance as follows:

The spirit of an absolute democracy of friendship in Rotary is very fine, but in the practice of it we must be practical. It is fine to have ideals of any sort, but we must make a practical application of them. There is no law of Rotary which compels the use of the first name, nor is there in the laws anything compelling the omission of the title "Mr." when referring to a Rotarian. There is a custom in this regard, but it is not universal in Rotary. We must not make the mistake of believing that every Rotarian thinks alike. In fact, Rotary stands for tolerance with regard to other men's views. Consequently, I would rather take a chance of jarring some Rotarian's aesthetic soul by not being informal enough, than to take the chance of shocking some other Rotarian by being alto-

gether too informal in referring to the man who holds the high office of President of Rotary International.

The use of the title "Mr." a couple of times in the biographical sketch of Don Adams was not premeditated, but slipped in, in the natural course of writing. That is the way that I think it should be in Rotary. Just let our respect as well as our friendliness slip in with perfect freedom.

Carrying this thought into the fellowship of the club or into inter-city and international fellowships, let me say that if a fellow-Rotarian refers to you as "Mr. So-and-So" or to me as "Mr. Perry," we should not feel offended, unless, indeed, he puts undue emphasis upon the "Mr." thereby directing attention to the maintaining of a barrier between him and us. Otherwise accept the title as a token of his respect. We may hope that he will become friendly enough with us to omit the use of the "Mr." but we ought not to try to force him in this regard. Friendship can not be forced.

We have long rejoiced in the fact that in Rotary there is nothing in the form of a ritual. *Let us be careful that we don't make a ritual out of the manner in which Rotarians shall be addressed or referred to.* What we want is friendship and understanding. To accomplish these, certain terminology may be helpful, and at certain times very important, but it is not essential to the existence of friendship and understanding. If anyone says we are not good Rotarians because we do not call each other by our first names I shall be apprehensive that there is a form of ritual in Rotary.

First-name fellowship: friendly or phony?

WHEN ROTARY was a fledgling, and its handful of members virtual strangers to one another, any effort at breaking down formality was welcomed. Thus it seemed natural that the early members called each other "Paul" and "Ches" and "Charlie," just as they would have as boys back in their small U.S. home towns. Today, the custom of "first-naming" Rotarians has spread around the world. Many Rotarians like the idea—others consider it too informal, too "American."

It is true that U.S. Americans are largely responsible for the easing of the rules of etiquette so that total strangers of all ages may greet one another as "Marge" and "Millie" and "Jim" and "Joe" at first sight. Actually they never even have to meet in person. First-name familiarity often begins at the other end of one's private telephone.

"Is this Tom Nelson?" the friendly salesman's voice answers your innocent "Hello." "We're having a wonderful sale of carpets this weekend at Rug-runners, Inc., and I wanted you to be among the first to know..."



Sydney J. Harris
Essay below is
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Field Newspaper Syndicate

MR. HARRIS SAYS:

When we judge another person's behavior, we imagine we are reacting in personal terms, but more often we are responding in terms of our particular culture—for it is the individual society, not the person, that decides what kind of conduct is "stuffy" or "friendly" or "flip."

In my own case, it took me years to get over the annoyance of being addressed by my first name by peo-

Magazine subscription agencies extend "personalized" invitations to Frank Smith and Sally Jones to try their periodicals; and at U.S. hospitals, patients being admitted, even those in their eighties and nineties, are greeted cheerily as "George" and "Elizabeth" by nurses and interns barely out of their teens.

The voting public talks of "Jimmy" Carter and "Ronnie" Reagan as if they were old neighbors from down the street; and movie heroes and heroines are certainly never thought of as "Mr. Brando" or "Ms. Streep."

"After a while the entire country begins to sound like a singles weekend," wrote Lance Morrow in a recent *Time* essay, "A Nation Without Last Names."

When U.S. journalist Sydney J. Harris addressed the subject of the first-name custom in his syndicated newspaper column, your editors sent copies of his remarks to Rotarians in several countries, asking for their comments on it and on the first-name custom in general. Here is a reprint of Mr. Harris's column and the Rotarians' replies:

ple who scarcely knew me. I resented it as a piece of unwarranted familiarity, though recognizing that in the American culture it is more often meant as a sign of friendliness and acceptance.

When my mother arrived in this country from England, she was in her mid-30s, and I never heard her address an adult friend by a first name; her oldest acquaintance here, after a quarter-century, was still "Mrs. Pickwick" to others, and to her face. And she, in return, addressed my mother as "Mrs. Harris," both publicly and privately.

I have lived here since a little boy, and yet those childhood influences persist, even when we rationally and consciously know they may mean little in terms of personal relationships. I can't recall ever having used someone's first name until he or she has asked me to—which Americans generally do 10 minutes after they meet you.

Well, is the British attitude "stuffy"? I think a case can be made out that degrees of intimacy are important, and should be signified by different modes of address.

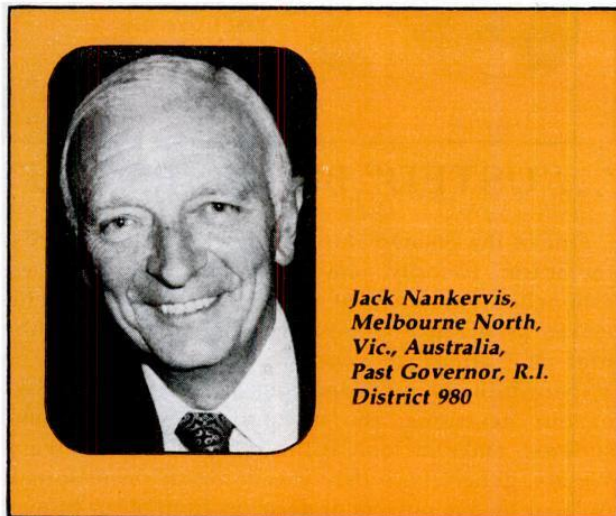
The paramount reason is that friendship becomes blurred and nearly meaningless if everyone is immediately on a first-name basis. We can clearly see the *reductio ad absurdum* of this habit in the Hollywood syndrome of promiscuous "dears" and "darlings" between people who hardly know each other's last

names well enough to spell them.

Most European languages have two forms of the second person singular—a “tu” and a “vous,” as it were. When two persons shift from the formal to the familiar form, it signifies a new closeness in the relationship. They are mutually ratifying a bond that did not exist before.

In America, anyone will call you “Jack” or “Bill” and then proceed to lie to you or stab you in the back (“Sorry, Bill, but you’re fired.”)—all the while exuding a hearty air of palliness, like the murmured “dahlings” between actresses who privately may hate each other’s guts.

I can’t find this an improvement over the European system, for familiarity can go as much too far in one direction as formality can go in the other. Taken all in all, I still prefer the mode of address in which you know where you stand with someone else, to the mode in which nobody stands anywhere that he can’t be suddenly kicked in the bottom by Jack.



*Jack Nankervis,
Melbourne North,
Vic., Australia,
Past Governor, R.I.
District 980*

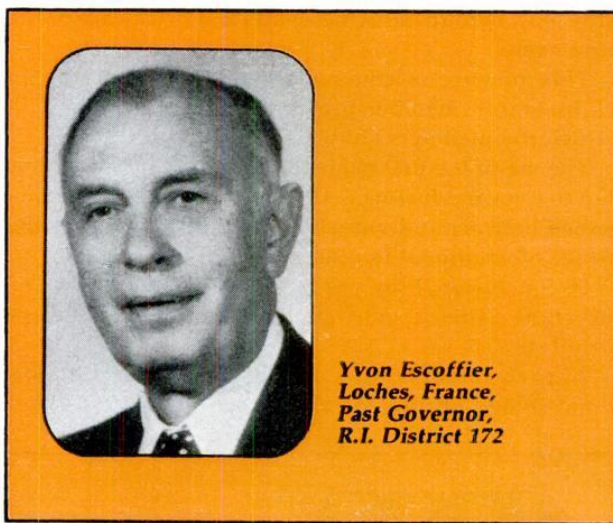
‘FIRST NAMES FAVORED’

The article by Mr. Sydney J. Harris makes interesting reading, but I was rather surprised and disappointed at the second last paragraph, which suggests, “In America anyone will call you Jack or Bill and then proceed to lie to you or stab you in the back.” Having visited America on a few occasions, I don’t agree with Mr. Harris, although I recognize that such happenings occur in all nations, but they are a minority.

As far as the use of a person’s first name is concerned, I can assure you it is the usual thing throughout Australia. Having lived in Australia all my life, maybe I have not been exposed to the British or European attitude which, of course, I know exists.

I feel the use of first names should be encouraged, and I believe Rotary sets a good example. The pocket badges with the first name boldly displayed make it easy to approach a fellow Rotarian, particularly when visiting clubs overseas. My point can best be shown

by the name badges at the international assembly in Boca Raton. The 20 Australian district governors-nominee who attended had not previously met their counterparts from other nations, but after eight days it was noticeable that first names were in use at all times.



*Yvon Escoffier,
Loches, France,
Past Governor,
R.I. District 172*

‘“VOUS” BECOMES “TU”’

Like Harry L. Ruggles, I think familiarity cannot be laid down as a principle nor used immoderately without losing the meaning of the feelings involved.

In France we have two ways of addressing the person to whom we are speaking. For the second person singular we use the pronouns “tu” and “vous.”

Propriety decrees the use of the “vous” form of you in all circumstances, even with our friends, and in certain families with family members and between spouses. The use of “tu” is popular in the milieu in which it is understood that the social or professional level, usually unpretentious, is shared.

But it can also be an indication of a close relationship established during a given period of life during which friendly, even affectionate, ties were made. Thus, students in high school and at universities and soldiers in the military use the “tu” form of you with one another. Professionally, those at the same level use “tu,” even in the highest echelons of the hierarchy.

This use of “tu” is therefore a sign of privileged relationships given absolute equality. In no case can it be unilateral. It must happen spontaneously from both sides. It creates a rapport between those who use it.

As to Rotary, being admitted to a club is to enter a world made up of friendship and brotherhood. It is to accept a total equality with one’s fellow Rotarians. It is to become a part of a whole, exceptional by its behavior and ethnics. Thus, nothing should stand in the way of the use of “tu” among members of a club who break bread together several times per month.

If there is some reticence in this practice, it can only come from those who have not completely understood the meaning of Rotary.

By the same token, the first name, the one by which our family members know us, should be used.

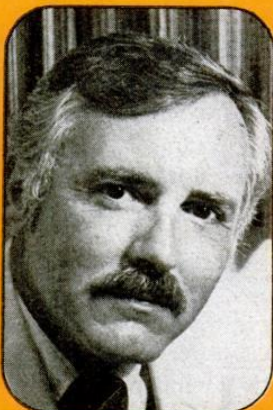
In his club, a member must cease to be what he is in relationship to those who in everyday life address him as "Monsieur." A new personality is taken on, exclusive in the group, which is evidenced by the use of the first name.

This practice is common in France, especially in clubs whose memberships are not too large and in which the members know one another well.

The use of the first name to the use of "tu" should be left to time and feelings. As friendly feelings are established between individuals, the use of "tu" will be the result of emotional impulses.

In conclusion, I say yes for the use of the first name in clubs. This should be imperative as a Rotary privilege.

As to the familiar form of you, "tu," Rotary brotherhood should be allowed to give birth to it.



*James L. Henderson,
Oxford, Mississippi,
U.S.A.
Past Governor,
R.I. District 680*

'CALL ME JIM'

Everyone on a first name basis in Rotary? Sounds good. A leveling, democratic way to relate to one another. A Rotarian banker and a Rotarian small-business owner can visit without any class or caste distinctions. No "Mr." Joe Banker talking to "Bill" Merchant. Simply Joe talking to Bill.

To do otherwise would, an author once said, be "putting others' heads higher than our own" and thus be a contradiction to the fellowship/friendship beliefs of Rotary.

Acknowledging the discomfort that a young member might feel when calling an older man with whom he had grown up by his first name and, realizing that there are those toward whom we wish to pay our respect, I still believe the calling of one person "Mr." and another by his first name implies a distance—maybe a barrier—that need not exist. That is, in my opinion, unconstructive.

Older men, wealthy men, prominent men, if they

are secure in themselves, do not need to be addressed by a title. To insist otherwise implies they do not feel that confident and thus want some means of acknowledging their superiority by putting another at a disadvantage.

Everyone on a first name basis in Rotary? By all means!



*Bruno Casanova
Arancibia,
San Bernardo, Chile,
Past Governor,
R.I. District 434*

'...“USTED” BECOMES “TÚ”'

One of the greatest things that we have in Rotary is the warm, friendly, almost familial atmosphere we find when we arrive at our weekly meetings. This makes us discard—almost without knowing it—the protective armor we wear during our daily lives. The responsibility of our professions or functions, the risks of our decisions, the disappointments we have suffered, make us look at life somewhat defensively. We are, generally, lonely executives or professionals isolated by our powers of decision from other human beings. This reduces our contacts and our knowledge of certain realities.

In Rotary we find a haven of peace. We are no longer the faraway Don Carlos or Don Luis but simply Carlos or Lucho. We are received affably; we smile and joke together. We talk about different situations, and we receive sincere opinions from angles we would not otherwise have considered or understood. We are aware of different community problems and needs and we work together to solve them. We think of ourselves as a family, with no one objecting or feeling strange when we call each other by first names or personal nicknames. On the contrary, the informal treatment, sincere and affectionate, together with the use of "Tú" in place of the formal "Usted," contribute toward the warm, friendly atmosphere that we find in Rotary. It makes us feel closer together among ourselves, as is recognized in Mr. Harris's article. The difference is that Rotarians never think or believe that behind this closeness could lie hypocrisy or lack of respect. If we were to compare ourselves with the Hollywood per-

sonalities that he mentions, we would see that those "dear" and "darling" actors work in the same medium, trying to *out-do* one another; in Rotary we work *together*, united by one common objective: to better the social development of human beings, in a better world.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Harris never knew Rotary.



**Romeo "Romy"
Gonzalez Pasay,
Rizal, Philippines
Associate Editor,
Philippine Rotary**

'FIRST NAMES, NICKNAMES'

Philippine culture, considered in a light vein, may be compared to one of our favorite desserts, the "Halo-Halo." The "H-H" is a kaleidoscopic masterpiece we usually enjoy as a light repast during hot summertimes at about four o'clock in the afternoon. It is a hodgepodge of diced fruits—candied purple yams and sweet potatoes, preserved nangka (breadfruit), caramelized boiled bananas, boiled corn kernels, white and black beans in syrup, and gelatine in various colors—all mixed in finely crushed ice and topped with milk, sugar, and puffed rice. This incongruous mixture is served in a huge glass with a long teaspoon.

Our population is an "H-H" in human form. At one time or another our country has been occupied by the Chinese, the British, the Spanish, the Americans, and the Japanese, but our heritage is intrinsically Malay. The Filipino manifests a bit of all these cultures.

A good number of Filipinos speak English well, in addition to two or three languages in the vernacular and a little Spanish. We have the sensitive feelings of the Chinese and do business like them. We have the open camaraderie of the American, the easy smile of the Malay, the dignity of the Spanish, and the courtesy of the Japanese.

Filipinos usually address each other with first names and nicknames, but behind that custom is the H-H synthesis. Take "Jose," for instance—one of the commonest names given to our countrymen.

The Malay bloodlines show up especially in the rural areas where Jose becomes: Pitong-tankad (tall); Josedaga (mousy); Manong-Jose (older brother); Ninong-Pinggoy (godfather); Tatang-Pitong (father, un-

cle, or as a term of respect); Pepeng-campaneru (the bell-ringer).

The soft idioms of the Chinese show up in: Joseling, Ping, Liloy, Ling, Pits, or Jay-ling.

The Spaniards who introduced Christianity to the Philippines are somewhat more formal, but gave us: Don Jose, Pepe, Señor Jose, Joselito, Pepi, or Pepito.

The Americans gave us the public school system resulting in: Joe, Joji, Jojit, Jun, Jody, Mr. J., Jos, in addition to the status symbol initials of J.J., J.M., J.R.T.

We even have a quick remedy for those who have forgotten the name or nickname of an acquaintance. We simply dodge the embarrassing issue by using such names as "Inday" (usually reserved for the favorite daughter of a family); "Pare" (once reserved for godfathers, but even used by and among children); "Boss" (used by anyone for anyone); "Among-tunay" (ditto). The Russian orientation of a few decades ago introduced "Ka," meaning comrade. So now, we also have Ka-Luis and Ka Mameng (for Carmen).

The result is confusing—and delightful.



**Tsutomu Saito,
Tateyama, Japan,
Past Governor, R.I.
District 279**

'IT'S UP TO THE PERSON'

Rotary International agrees to eliminate nicknames from publications, and I think this is very pertinent. I think each country has its way to express friendship.

In Japan there are several ways to call friends. It's up to the person to address you in any way he wishes; it's up to the individual's discretion.

"If your club levies a dime when a member addresses another as 'Mister,' it goes right back to Rotary's beginning. Most of us were strangers and it seemed natural to use first names, just as we had as boys."

**Harry L. Ruggles
THE ROTARIAN
February 1952**



剛入社的時候，覺得社友之間的稱呼很奇怪，都是叫英文名字，但是所叫的英文名字不是英文通常使用的名字，而是一些所謂的「非專有名詞」，充其量只不過是一個「普通名詞」而已。

比如說，有人叫 Chemical，翻成中文應是「化學」，有人叫 Equipment，翻譯成中文應是「設備」，這樣叫來叫去，非常有趣。後來才知道，它代表的是社友的行業分類，做紙的叫 Paper、做金屬的叫 Metal、做茶葉的當然就叫 Tea 了。

所以除了本社有社友名字叫做 Lawyer（律師），別的社也有許多叫 Lawyer 的，本社有做牙醫的社友叫 Dentist 的，別的社當然也有做牙醫，而用英文叫他為 Dentist 的。最多的是有關保險業的社友所取的英文名字，叫做 Insurance（保險），於是每個社都有人叫 Insurance。

曾有一位社友是中學校長，理所當然的英文名字就叫 Principal（校長）了，於是每個人見到他都叫他 Principal，就差沒鞠躬了。

其實英語系的國家所用的英文姓名，有許多是重覆的。英語系的國家，其人民所用的英文名字，最常用的不過只有三百多個，比如說以 A 字開頭的 Andy，就有不少。

以美國為例，超過三億人口的國家，最常用的英文名字才不過三百多個。換言之，一個英文名字可能有近百萬人同時在使用，當然，我講的是「First Name」，就是所謂的「第一個名字」，後面還有「Last

Name」，就是所謂的「最後一個名字」。

比如說美國前總統甘迺迪，我們所以用中文稱呼他為甘迺迪，就是用他的「Last Name」音譯而來，他的英文名字全名應叫「John F. Kennedy」，「John」就是他的「First Name」，而「Kennedy」就是他的「Last Name」，中間的「F」，我們為了方便解釋，就稱之為「中間」名字吧。

其實「中間」名字往往是用一個單字母來表明，就是所謂的「initial」，通常有特殊的紀念意義，往往只有當事人本身才知道，而當事人本身所以知道，當然是由幫他取名字的父母親告訴他的。

所以英語系國家的英文名字，通常是由兩到三個部分來組成的，而中間的名字，並不是所有的名字一定都會使用的，結果我們往往看到他們用的就是兩部分的名字。比如說美國前總統柯林頓 Bill Clinton 就是用兩個名字。而另一位前總統甘迺迪 John F. Kennedy 的英文名字就有三個了，「John」是第一個名字，「F」是中間名字，「Kennedy」就是最後一個名字了。

這裡要強調的是，「最後名字」才是最重要的，因為「最後名字」Last Name 就是他們的「Family Name」，也就是代表他們的「家族名字」，跟中文剛好是顛倒的。而美國的家族名字最常見的約有 1,000 多個。

我們的家族名字是放在前面的，比如說，姓劉、姓關、姓張，或趙、李、林、陳都是中國人的家族名稱。父母給的名字

是放在後面的，而他們正好相反。父母給的名字是放在前面的，是第一個名字，家族的名字是放在後面的，是最後的名字。我們为了方便稱呼，所以把甘迺迪總統的家族名字「Kennedy 甘迺迪」用音譯翻譯出來稱呼他。

講了半天，有些社友的英文名字並非依此英語系的規則來命名的，而是用行業的特徵來命名的，我們勉強可以稱之為「綽號」(nickname)。所以每位社友都有一個綽號（或者叫小名）以方便稱呼，也方便瞭解他所從事的行業。我們就用這些「Paper」、「Tea」、「Chemical」、「Insurance」叫來叫去，最後要叫出他的中文姓名反而困難了，真的要想很久才行。

有一次一位從澳洲來的女交換學生(RYE, Rotary Youth Exchange)，在晚上的爐邊會議中聽大家叫來叫去，發現了這個現象，很困惑的問我，何以社友們之間用如此之稱呼，她覺得非常有趣，我說要扶輪社友們拉近彼此距離，用綽號來稱呼，又立刻可以瞭解他所從事之行業，不是很好嗎？

其實後來依我的觀察，發現日本人是不用這樣的方式來互稱的，他們的社名就是原來的日文姓名。韓國人也不用此方式，是用原來的韓文名字的。新加坡人的英文姓名更是把中文姓名直接音譯成英文，姓氏跟中文一樣是擺在最前面的，而且音譯是用閩南語音譯的，比如說姓洪，音譯成 Ang「昂」，而不是 Horng「洪」。

以前三、四十年前做生意，常常要接觸外國客戶，往往自己都會有一個英文名字，為了符合老外的用法，我們也自己取一個英文名字放在前面，而把自己的姓氏放在後面。比如說：「Michael Chang 嘜哭張」（用台語發音）、「George Lo 借錢羅」，還有人英文名字取成了「T.P. Ku」的。

看過「魯賓遜漂流記」小說的人，大概都會記得其中有一段情節，就是當魯賓遜因為船難而漂流到荒島之後，遇到了一個當地的土著，兩人指手畫腳互報姓名，怎麼也記不住。

當天是星期五，魯賓遜乾脆就叫那土著為「Friday 星期五」了。當然星期五不是一個專有名詞，卻可以當成一個親切的綽號。有時也要看場合，每個組織裡均有各種不同之文化，互相尊重是必要的，每個人也會有各種不同的成長環境與對價值的認定，不得不謹慎。

大家大概都會有同樣的經驗，就是當叫出某一位社友的英文社名時，比如說：Lawyer，卻往往怎麼樣也想不起他真正的中文姓名了，形成了一種可能只有在台灣才有的特殊扶輪文化。

因為是國際的社團，所有文件來往通常都是用英文，除了姓氏還有許多相關的職稱，如果沒有起碼的英文程度，是非常不容易瞭解的。許多英文的職稱是用頭一個大寫字母 initial 的方式來表現的。現就社友們比較常碰到的，簡單的舉幾個例如下，以供參考：

P：President 社長

IPP：Immediate Past President 甫卸任社長

P.P.：Past President 前社長

A.G.：Assistant Governor 助理總監

D.V.S.：District Vice Secretary 地區副秘書

D.G.：District Governor 地區總監

P.D.G.：Past District Governor 前地區總監

D 3490：District 3490 3490 地區

R.I.：Rotary International 國際扶輪

RIP：Rotary International President 國際扶輪社長

以上跟我們中文的全職簡稱如「都發會」（都市發展計畫委員會的簡稱）的道理是一樣的。