

What's in a name? Often, more than you know

Shakespeare's tragic love story "Romeo and Juliet" is a treasure trove of quotable lines. The scene in which the young star-crossed lovers from two warring families lament their fate and say they want to renounce their family names is particularly famous.

Juliet: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet." The line strikes a chord with us because it's true.

But at the same time, it is also true that names themselves have certain "scents" that are difficult to erase. In some cases, by changing names, all

images they connote could also be lost.

There is a move to change the term *ro-gakko* (school for the deaf) to *chokaku tokubetsu shien gakko* (special support school for the hearing-impaired). I heard that the measure is in response to a revision of the School Education Law.

On March 10, the vernacular Asahi Shimbun ran a story that Naoki Yamamoto of Shizuoka opposed the move. Yamamoto, 35, who also studied at a school for the deaf, feels pride in the word *ro*, meaning deaf.

The Japanese Federation of the Deaf is also opposed to the proposed name change. Schools for the deaf have a long history and are known for their use of sign language. The name is filled with various scents. Yamamoto is concerned that the name "special support school" would place the deaf in a lower status as recipients of support.

Bureaucratism often emits unfeeling scents. A recent typical example is the term *koki-koreisha* (literally late-stage elderly), the official name by which the government refers to people aged

75 and older. The Asahi Shimbun ran a letter to the editor from an unhappy reader who wrote: "I feel as though I have finally been driven to a cliff of age."

Even when names are changed, perhaps reality remains the same. However, if we call *edamame* "premature soybeans" green beans in pods as were formerly referred to in government statistics, the name would look unappetizing on *izakaya* pub menus.

Wasn't there a name to make one's old age feel warmer?

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