

DISABLED students in the library classroom



PRESENTER:
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IMPORTANCE:

Students learn better in environments where they're comfortable. Using their preferred language and descriptors makes them comfortable—and demonstrates respect for them.

BACKGROUND:

- 1959: PFL is first advocated for.
- 1980s: PFL sees widespread use when the HIV/AIDS community embraced it.
- 1988: First use of the phrase "person first language."
- 1970s–1980s: Disabled people, particularly those whose disabilities manifested visibly, are largely ostracized from society and either hidden or institutionalized. They are often called "monsters," "freaks," or "morons," and their very humanity is denied. PFL is meant to help non-Disabled people recognize Disabled people as human.
- Late 1980s/early 1990s: PFL overcorrects the issue and ends up separating the ideas of personhood and disability too much. PFL becomes a way to remind Disabled people that they aren't fully human and to suggest that being Disabled is something so bad that it isn't consistent with being human.
- 1999: Jim Sinclair, Autism advocate and founder of Autism Network International, writes the seminal article in favor of IFL.
- 2000s–present: The disability community continues to advocate for IFL, but non-Disabled people continue to insist upon using PFL—against the wishes of Disabled people themselves.

Information educators should use identity-first language to refer to Disabled students.

- Information educators should **adopt IFL as our default language**. Right now, PFL is our default—but it doesn't make sense for our default to be the language not preferred by those it's meant to serve.
- That said, we should **use the language that each individual wants us to use**, whether it's IFL, PFL, or something different. That demonstrates respect.

PFL

- Person with a disability
- Person with autism
- Person who is Deaf
- Person who is Blind

IFL

- Disabled person
- Autistic person
- Deaf person
- Blind person

Explanation

- In referring to disability, there are two primary types of phrasing you can use: **person-first language (PFL)** and **identity-first language (IFL)**.
- PFL is usually seen as **medicalizing** disability because it separates the person from their disability, while IFL is seen as **embracing** the identity of Disabled because it incorporates being Disabled as a positive characteristic.
 - We say "kind person" and "generous person," not "person with kindness" or "person with generosity"—because those are positive traits to possess. But we say "person with cancer" because that's a negative disease to have. Yet once a person has beaten cancer, they become a "cancer survivor."
- You can also **capitalize the "D" in Disabled**. Not everyone does; it's a newer choice that some Disabled people are making, following the Deaf, Blind, and Autistic communities, to signify the identity- and culture-status of being Disabled.

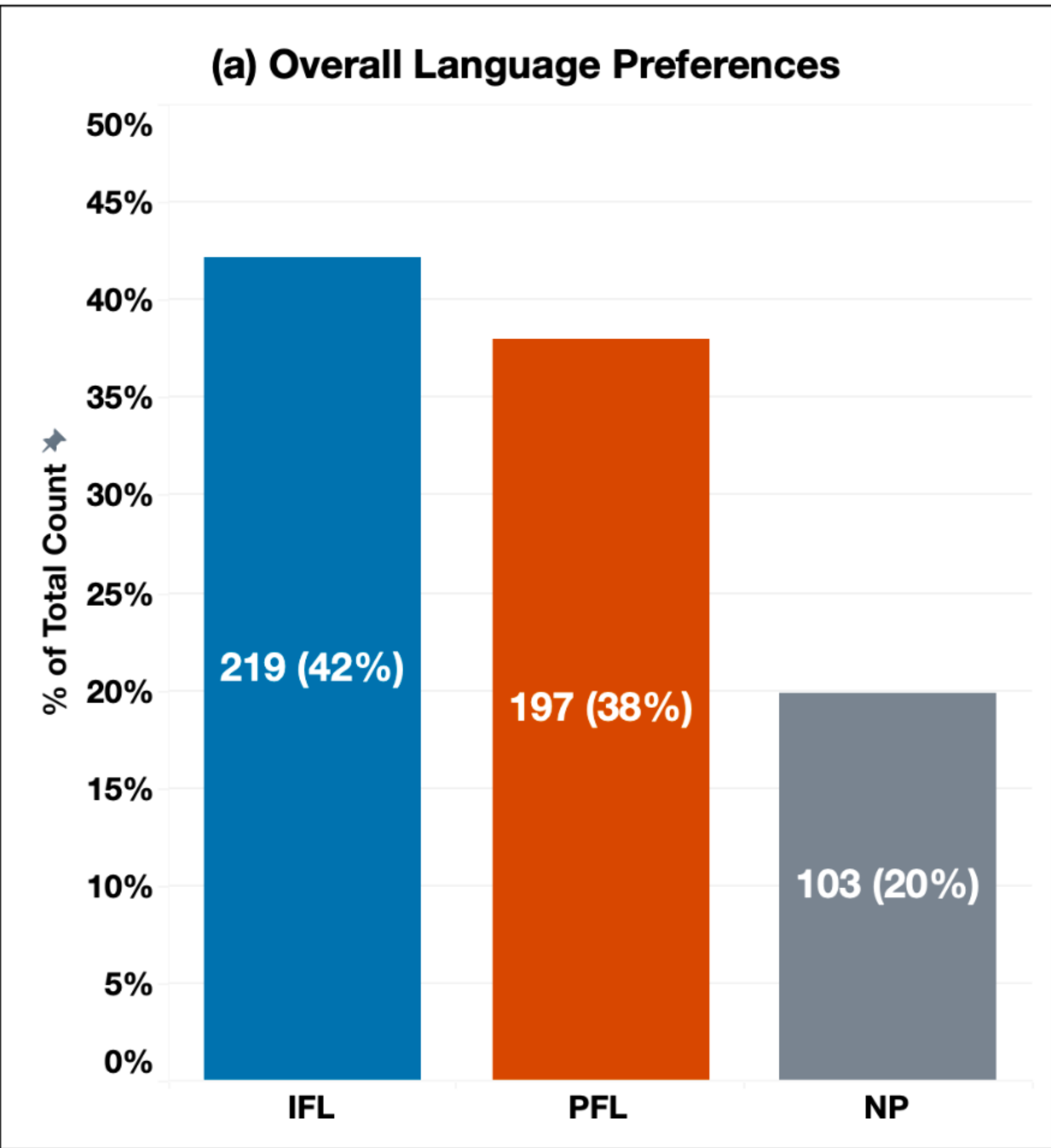


WEBSITE

For an accessible version of this poster, a video presentation with additional context, and other materials, please scan this QR code.

Recommended Reading

- Elizabeth Pineo, " 'But the Bumpies Hurt!': Autism and the Importance of Identity-First Language," *Including Disability 2* (2022): 27–60.
- Connor Keating et al., "Autism-related language preferences of English-speaking individuals across the globe: A mixed methods investigation," *Autism Research* (2022): 1–23.
- Lior Levy et al., "Respectful Language as Perceived by People with Disabilities," *ASSETS* (October 2021): 1–4.
- Ather Sharif, Aedan McCall, Kianna Bolante, "Should I Say 'Disabled People' or 'People with Disabilities'? Language Preferences of Disabled People Between Identity- and Person-First Language," *ASSETS* (October 2022): 1–18.



Section a of Figure 1, from Ather Sharif, Aedan McCall, Kianna Bolante, "Should I Say 'Disabled People' or 'People with Disabilities'? Language Preferences of Disabled People Between Identity- and Person-First Language," *ASSETS* (October 2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3517428.3544813>.

