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English 131

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10/22/12

Language in American Society: Bringing Humans Together or Setting Them Apart

Language was originally created as a way for people to communicate with each other, essentially bringing them together. As time has progressed, this has phenomena has shifted and it can now separate people, as it once did to bring them together. Moreover, language is now used by humanity as a source of commonality and in other instances as a way to separate and distinguish ourselves. Conversely, these effects of language contradict each other, yet they are both apparent throughout society. Language, with all its uses, is the primary form of communication for humans, allowing them to expresses themselves and work together. Therefore, it is also a catalyst in aiding people to connect with themselves and bring them together. Knowing the right language or more than one language will also expand your ability to communicate with more people around the world. Consequently, Language has two sides to it and therefore also has the power to set people apart. This can be caused by people speaking a certain language that others around them do not. In addition, it can be used to separate people of different intelligence and social classes. Others are proud of their language and use this aspect of it as a way to distinguish themselves. Even though society uses language to separate people at times or find a way to unite through the use of language, it still remains as the primary source of communication for humanity.

Humans use language to communicate, express, and work together. It is the root of the advancement of the human race and it is necessary to know how to speak and read in order to flourish in today’s society. Language allows us to communicate and share ideas, ultimately working together and organizing each other to help create. Therefore knowing more languages creates more opportunities to communicate with people. Amy Li explains that in her experience “everything is becoming more globalized and multinational” and that “more and more humans of different races are coming together”. People of different countries are coming together through language and it is not uncommon for a person to speak more than one language today. Thomas expresses concern though, that it is important to “speak English, as it is hard to find work otherwise”. Other than working together, humans use the communication aspect of language to express themselves emotionally as well. It is important for humans to express emotion whether it be through talking, singing, or even writing. People will listen to each other, support each other, and work together, ultimately uniting through the use of language.

Language can be used as method to connect with people when entering a new community. When traveling to a different country, the language spoken there will most likely be foreign. This can make it difficult to communicate and integrate with people there. Certain establishments have been created to help in this process, such as the embassy, and serve as the liaison in connecting people of different languages. Furthermore, when immigrating to a different country it can be quite difficult to meet people, especially when you are new to the country and don’t know anyone. It can take time to adjust to a new culture, and become comfortable with one’s new environment. Even though language is the cause of this separation between native people and immigrants, ultimately setting them apart, it can equally serve as a way for immigrants speaking the same language to unite. In this situation language can create smaller communities for immigrants to connect with each other. This is something that my parents experienced when moving to American from France. They knew no one here except their employer and another French immigrant who had previously moved here. He introduced them to the French community in America, and through the French language they were able to expand their friendships and connections with people. The French language had opened up a path for them to connect with people in their new environment, that extended into them even meeting Americans and people from other cultures and languages.

Sometimes the language that somebody speaks within an international and diverse community can set them apart. Growing up I attended an international middle school and high school. This meant that there was an international section that followed the International Baccalaureate program, and was composed of many cultures from around the world. The common language that was spoken in this section was English. There was then the French section, which followed the French Baccalaureate and was composed only of native French speakers. Even though our school was considered a diversely rich and international environment, there was quite a separation of people, due to the language they spoke. I was in both programs at different times, and was caught in between both worlds, and therefore was able to witness the separation take place. The native French speakers all stayed together and had parties where they only invited themselves. Occasionally a couple international students would be invited, but when they attended these parties it was as if they were not welcomed as everybody only spoke French and made them feel very uncomfortable. The international section on the other hand was much more open and would tend to invite anyone from both sections and even people from outside the school. I interviewed Joey, who is someone with a rich linguistic background, and he mentioned that his experience was that “in a group of people, if only a few people spoke a language, then they would separate themselves from the group by speaking in that language.” Therefore it is important to be aware of one’s environment and to be sure to not exclude people when speaking a foreign language.

People of certain regions will use language to distinguish themselves. Each country has its own official language and sometimes that language will have different dialects. These dialects reveal where the person speaking it is from, and they use this dialect to distinguish from different places who speak the same language. In James Baldwin’s “If Black English isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What is?” he discusses the different dialects of the French language and explains that “A Frenchman living in Paris speaks a subtly and crucially different language from that of the man living in Marseilles; neither sounds very much like a man living in Quebec; and they would all have great difficulty in apprehending what the man from Guadeloupe, or Martinique is saying.”(Baldwin 350). They are all speaking French but with a dialect true to their own territory. Furthermore, Baldwin explains that language “is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity” (Baldwin 350). This statement can be applied to the south of France which takes pride in its rich culture that was highly influenced by Spain, Italy, and Northern Africa. These regions are trying to preserve their culture and language in order to distinguish themselves. The area influenced by Spain, called Cataluña, speaks its own language called Catalan. The more central region called Occitania has its own language called l’Occitan, and Provence “still clings to its ancient and musical Provencal, which resists being described as a ‘dialect’” (Baldwin 350). In addition, Gloria Anzaldua explains in the chapter “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” from her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* that this actuality is true for the Spanish language as well. Chicano is a language that is used by Mexicans living in America today and Anzaldúa expresses that “Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization, have developed significant difference in the Spanish we speak”. She goes on to reveal that even Chicanos from different areas have different dialects (Anzaldúa 343). There are “several regional dialects” and a Chicano from Texas may have difficulty in understanding a Chicano from Arizona or New Mexico (Anzaldúa 343). The spoken language is a strong tool, and all these people have been able to harness and use it to their advantage in order to differentiate themselves.

Language can be used to distinguish people of intelligence or intellect. When applying for a job, people will often be brought in for an interview. The purpose of this interview is to discuss with the person and to get a sense of how intelligent they are and how well they are suited for the job. Simply by the way someone speaks, their choice of words, and how well they can present themselves with words, the person conducting the interview will have to make a decision and chose to hire the person or not. Applying for college is another example of how language will separate people of different intelligences. An application is used by colleges to see how well someone has grasped the tool of language, and ask applicants to demonstrate who they are, through writing. Colleges often do not see the person who is applying, and have to rely solely on their language to make a choice. Moreover, there is a transformation of the French language used by a group of people in France called Rakai. These people transform French words when speaking, by flipping the syllables around and often speak with many grammatical mistakes. Rakai people are often associated with a poor and uneducated background, and because they have grown up speaking French this way, it makes it tremendously difficult for them to find jobs. Using language as a tool to differentiate people of different intelligences can be beneficial in choosing the elite, but it can also harm the less fortunate.

Speaking a certain language can reveal what social class someone is from, setting them apart from the others classes. In Arabic countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, French is spoken by the wealthy class of people. When they speak French in their country whose native language is not French, they are instantly distinguished as being from the upper class. In Samoa, the chiefs and their families will speak a complicated version of Samoan called Matai Language. People who speak this language have high titles, are highly respected, and will often receive gifts from other families and villages. Growing up in and belonging to certain social classes will cause someone to develop their class’ language. Gloria Anzaldúa explains that she has experienced this when she says that “From school, the media, and job situations, I’ve picked up standard and working-class English” (Anzaldúa 342). If someone speaks in England, others will be able to categorize and identify what social class they are from. As Baldwin puts it “To open your mouth in England is … to ‘put your business in the street.’ You have confessed your parents, your youth, your school, your salary, your self-esteem, and, alas, your future” (Baldwin 351).

Humans depend on each other, and without communication this would not be possible. We use language to communicate, allowing us to connect with each other or work together. Also, more and more companies are becoming multinational and hiring people from across the world, bringing us all together. In contrast, some people use language to separate themselves or to differentiate between different kinds of humans. It can be used a tool for distinguishing the intellectuals and people right for a job, but sometimes it is not the ideal way to make an accurate judgment. The south of France distinguishes itself from France with its languages, as a way to preserve it culture. Language can be used in many different ways to bring people together and benefit the human race but it can equally have a negative effect and cause people to separate themselves. In the end, language is one of the primary causes for humans advancing in society, and it is what separates us from animals.

Work Cited

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