Antoine Nauleau

English 131

Leah F. Rankin

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Language and Society: Language Can Either Separate or Bring People Together

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 language is now used just as much to separate people, as it once did to bring them together. Language is now used to separate people, sometimes used to limit their abilities and often to not allow them to live their lives to their full potential. When someone opens their mouth and speaks, so much information is exposed which can reveal where they are from, what social class they belong in, and how intelligent they are. Some people are proud of their language and use it as a way to distinguish themselves. Others aspire to learn other people’s language in order to integrate into their culture and remove this separation. Also, due to the vast differences in language, it can sometimes be a barrier, limiting information and communication.

The language that someone speaks demonstrates where they are from. 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. 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 explains 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).

People will use language to separate and identify themselves. 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 cultural that was highly influenced by Spain, Italy, and Northern Africa. The south divides’ itself into regions which are struggling to preserve their original identity, their culture, and their language, which is being overrun by French society. The area influenced by Spain, called Cataluña distinguishes itself and 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). Similarly, Anzaldúa discusses how language is crucial to identity and how “Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos’ need to identify [them]selves as a distinct people” (Anzaldúa 342). She goes on to illustrates that they spoke Spanish as a native tongue, but were not Spanish, and that they were living in America, but did not identify with Standard English, and were caught in between both languages. They were different and could not connect or identify with either language. Therefore they had no other choice but to create “A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves” (Anzaldúa 342).

When speaking a language, someone can reveal their social class just by the way they talk. In Arabic countries, 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).

Language can also be used to separate people of different intelligence. 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. With how the person speaks, their choice of words, and how well they can present themselves with words, the person condoning the interview will decided to hire them or not. Applying for college is another example of how language will separate people of different intelligences. How one write’s their essays or fills out the applications will be the basis of being accepted into college. Colleges do not see the person who is applying, and have to rely solely on their language to make a choice.

Not being able to read a language or not being able speak the right language can limit someone from information or hinder them unable to communicate. Being illiterate shelters someone from a variety of information that is on the internet, books, or even everything that is taught in school. Without being able to read, there are many intellectual ideas or thoughts that are only shared through books and novels. Not speaking the right language is also a handicap, and as Baldwin explains “If two black people, at that bitter hour of the world’s history, had been able to speak to each other, the institutions of chattel slavery could never have lasted as long as it did.” (Balwin 351).

The benefits of language far outweigh the disadvantages, but it is still important not to neglect the issues that persist. Language can reveal where someone is from and can sometimes separate people, but not always in a negative manner. The south of France distinguishes itself from France with its languages, as a way to preserve it culture. Separation can create identity as well and in the case of the Chicano’s, bring them together. Language also reveals which social class someone is from, which is something private and that does not always want to be shared. It can be 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 of someone. Illiteracy is also disadvantage in progressing through life and not being able to fully enjoy it. Finally, not being able to speak the same language makes it nearly impossible to communicate, causing slavery to last as long as it did. Language is not perfect, but it vastly important and crucial for human survival today.

Work Cited

Baldwin, James. "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" *Acts Of Inquiry*. Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. 349-52. Print.

Anzaldua, Gloria. "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." *Acts Of Inquiry*. Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. 340-49. Print.

Antoine,

Your introduction is good, but it could bring those ideas all together a bit more neatly. Overall, this is a pretty good essay and very well synthesized.

The highlighted sections are mostly grammatical issues. If you have any questions about your paper, my comments, or the class in general, I would be happy to discuss them with you in person during office hours.

**Short Assignment 1.2 Rubric**

See the course syllabus for a discussion of each evaluation category.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Outstanding** | **Strong** | **Good** | **Acceptable** | **Inadequate** |
| **Introduction:** Begins with a concise paragraph that clearly articulates what will be discussed in the paper and what the stakes of the paper are. |  | X |  |  |  |
| **Organization**: Shows evidence of a clear trajectory, including an introduction, good topic sentences throughout, and a conclusion. There are good transitions from one paragraph to the next. | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Issue Identification**: The topic chosen for the paper is structured around an *issue* that is well-presented to the reader. The author does not take a binary approach in addressing the selected issue. | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Quotations:** Both essays were cited at least once, the quotations chosen were appropriate to the topic and argument, and all quotations/paraphrased remarks were discussed in the context of the author’s overall point. | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Synthesis**: Uses points from both of the essays together to in support of a cohesive argument. The texts are not simply summarized. | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Tone:** Written in a manner appropriate for an academic audience. The author explains ideas and references that the audience may not understand, while not elaborating points that should be common knowledge. | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Format:** The paper is of the required length and follows the prescribed formatting guidelines. | X |  |  |  |  |