Yuwei Huang

Tesla Schaeffer

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Language Addition instead of Language Replacement

Nowadays, some “majority languages” like English and Chinese are spreading out in an astonishing speed, and there is also a trend that these “majority languages” may finally replace almost all “minority languages” with small language speaker populations. This trend may be positive because such a language replacement can different join people into the same language discourse community, which eliminates the necessity of probably informational-losing language translation and brings convenience for people’s communication. But it may also be negative because language is more or less a part of culture or foundation of a certain group of people. In order to specify the claim, in this paper the majority language is defined as the language spoken by the majority in a certain area while the minority language is spoken by the minority. This paper will analyze the positive and negative effects of language replacement to people and how we should face and deal with this phenomenon by examining Amy Tan’s *Mother Tongue*, Boroditsky’s *Lost In Translation*, St. James’ *I has A Dream*, and Jim Borgman’s cartoon *A New Ghetto*.

Language replacement can be beneficial for people who speak the minority language because it offers them a chance to express their thoughts to people who speak majority language, which is especially significant for those who live in a circumstance surrounded by people who speak majority language. St. James has published an advertisement to ban Ebonics. In this advertisement, James shows us a sentence written in Ebonics “I Has A Dream” on the back of Dr. Martin Luther King, and below this sentence is a text telling us speaking Ebonics is isolating and losing voice again. (*Acts of Inquiry* P703) Jim Borgman’s cartoon *A New Ghetto* shows us a word Ebonics, and the letter O in the middle is a round wall constructed by bricks. There are some people wearing shabby clothes inside the wall saying “JUS’ WHAT WE NEEDED-A NEW GHETTO.” (*Acts of Inquiry* P394) These two examples tell us if the majority people surround us but we don’t use their language, we isolate our connection to the outer society, and we will finally lose our voice or social position because of this disconnection to the society.

However, language replacement can also be harmful to those who speak a minority language. Language is a part of culture or even the media of culture. For example, we Cantonese watch Cantonese operas and Cantonese comedies; we go to Yum-cha (“drink tea”) and enjoy Dim Sums. For opera and comedy, Cantonese is everything. We cannot translate the lyrics of the song in Cantonese opera into Mandarin because that will lose either its meaning or its rhythm. We cannot play comedies in Mandarin because there are many slangs or special lexis that cannot be translated. If we can only use Mandarin, we will forget the origin and meaning of finger kowtow (a gesture Cantonese use to appreciate others’ pouring tea) and cannot understand the art of Dim Sums’ names. Without language, all cultures based on that language would collapse.

Furthermore, language influences the way we think. If we replace our language with another one, we may have problems understanding what and how our ancestors think, which is bad for inheriting our cultures, knowledge and thoughts. In the article *Lost in Translation*, the author Boroditsky tells us “in Pormpuraaw, a remote Aboriginal community in Australia, the indigenous languages don't use terms like ‘left’ and ‘right.’ Instead, everything is talked about in terms of absolute cardinal directions (north, south, east, west), which means you say things like, ‘There's an ant on your southwest leg.’” These people use absolute directions to refer to everything, which force them to think in an absolute direction way and have a good sense of direction. We can’t understand why they use absolute directions and how they keep track of their direction because we are not Pormpuraaw people. If these people replace their language with a majority language, they may lose their own thoughts about directions and they will have a normal sense of directions as most people have. In addition, they will also be confused by the fact that their ancestors have sense of directions much better than they have.

However, the diversity of ways of thinking can also have negative influence to the communication between discourse communities. Because people may not understand those who think differently than they do. If we only consider the communication between people who speak different languages, language replacement is absolutely a good way to let people understand what others think. Also in the article *Lost in Translation*, Boroditsky tells us languages also shape how we understand causality. “For example, English likes to describe events in terms of agents doing things. English speakers tend to say things like ‘John broke the vase’ even for accidents. Speakers of Spanish or Japanese would be more likely to say ‘the vase was broken.’ Such differences between languages have profound consequences for how their speakers understand events, construct notions of causality and agency, what they remember as eyewitnesses and how much they blame and punish others.” These two ways of thinking are totally different, and this difference are also macroscopically reflected. For example, because Japanese tend not to blame other as much as what English speakers do, Japanese custody may tend to use more logical reasoning than eyewitnesses while English speaking countries tend not to do so. And probably in English speaking countries, the personality of the criminal may be a factor that can influence the result of the sentence. If an English speaker visits Japan and witnesses the process of committing the crime, He/she may not be accepted as an eyewitness because the custody doesn’t very believe eyewitness even though he/she swear he/she clearly knows the details. Because neither the custody nor that visitor understands why they think in this way, the communication broke up. On the contrary, if they speak the same language, they will think in the same way and understand what and why the other thinks in that way, and then the communication will be succeeded.

All in all, language replacement can positively influence those who speak minority language because replacing their language by a majority language allows them to express their thoughts to the majority, and it also unifies people’s way of thinking, which allows them to understand what people are actually thinking and why they think in that way and how to respond to their thoughts. But language replacement can also negatively influence minority language speakers because replacement means the disappearance of the original language, which destroys the culture related to this language, and also the language replacement will not only unify people’s way of thinking but also split the minority speaker’s way of thinking from their ancestors’ way of thinking.

Language replacement is both positive and negative, but there is a third choice other than language replacement and anti-language replacement. We can do an addition instead of replacement. In order words, we can be bilingual. Being bilingual means we are able to communicate with the majority and the minority in two different languages, understanding the cultures from both the majority and the minority, and keeping two different ways of thinking and be ready to switch according to which language we use. It sounds cool and powerful, but it is not as easy as we think.

Those who learn a second language spend more time to learn it and balance two languages they have learned. So, they may speak their second language much worse than the native speakers do. Unfortunately, people tend to disrespect those who speak broken language. We have spent much time learning language at school, so people may make a relationship between how good we speak and how much time we are educated, and they will subconsciously believe language level is positive correlation to knowledge level. While people who learn a majority language not very well as second language suffer from their broken language, people who got a thorough language replacement will not face this problem. Amy Tan is an American born Chinese, and her mother can only speak broken English and Chinese. Tan’s mother is an example of language addition, while Tan herself is an example of language replacement (although she started learning Chinese as an adult). In Amy Tan’s *Mother Tongue*, Tan tells us her mother was not respected because she can’t speak perfect English. “People in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.” (*Acts of Inquiry* P713) And Tan also gives us examples that if she repeats her mother’s words in perfect English, she will not be disrespected and many problems can be solved.

Although getting a language replacement is less painful than getting a language addition, those who have already learned a language are basically not able to get a language replacement because their first language is already fixed in their mind. So, what they can do to be able to communicate with the majority is to be bilingual. It is painful, but if they do it, they can gain a lot.

Works Cited

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| **Skill** | **Outstanding** | **Very Strong** | **Strong** | **Good** | **Inadequate** |
| Articulating a **complex claim,** emerging from and exploring a line of inquiry |  |  |  |  | \* |
| Using and **quoting from** course texts strategically |  |  |  | \* |  |
| Containing close and thoughtful **analysis** of the issues at play |  | \* |  |  |  |
| Utilizing a **clear organizational strategy** and effective transitions |  | \* |  |  |  |

Edwin,

As you can see from the rubric above, I think this has the potential to be a very strong or outstanding paper- you write exceptionally well, and your thoughts are clear and well-articulated. However, as I pointed out above, your claim appeared descriptive until around the middle of the paper, when you suddenly presented an argument but then didn’t have enough time to fully explore it. In the revision stage, I would suggest you focus on this- how can your foreground your claim, and emphasize the textual evidence that will support it? You do a good job in setting up the situation, but I think the weight of the paper should fall towards your claim. Does that make sense? We can talk about this in conference as well. Overall, this has a lot of potential- good start!