Requirements

— 5–7 pages
— References to at least two sources that are not part of our assigned reading, at least one of which must not be mentioned on this assignment
— Rough draft due at the start of class on May 5
— Second draft due at the start of class on May 7
— Final draft due at the start of class on May 12

The goal

Language influences, and is influenced by, every aspect of society. The task for this paper is to find a social or cultural issue that interacts in some way with language, and then support a position that relates to the interaction. The position can take many forms. Among other things, you can

1. criticize an existing position;
2. argue that we require a compromise between two or more existing positions; or
3. explain how a previously overlooked fact, incident, or claim is relevant to the issue.

The paper can take many forms. You can follow the model of a serious magazine article (like Wallace’s), a personal narrative (like Malcolm X’s piece in Language Awareness), a critical overview with some editorializing (like Pullum’s Nature piece), a research paper (like King’s in Language Awareness).

You are free to find and define your own topic for this paper. The following are some suggestions for areas that you could explore. Both author and audience are sure to be most pleased by original topics expressed in clear, passionate prose.

You are welcome to incorporate personal experiences into this pieces, for illustrative purposes, or to further bolster another writer’s claims or your own.

Recurring reference in the following

Suggestions

The language of the media

— **A tip** This topic must be narrowed down considerably. I suggest picking one medium and studying its language: language and TV [maybe restrict even further, to cable news channels, or to TV ads], language and radio [a particularly topical topic], language and print journalism, etc.

— **Some questions to get you started** How might we characterize the language of various kinds of broadcasters? How does the language heard on PBS differ from the language heard on Fox, or MTV? How does TV’s language differ from print journalism’s? What linguistic cues indicate to us that someone is delivering a comedy monologue instead of reporting? What cues indicate to us that something is an advertising slogan? What can we learn about a society from the language of its advertisers? How do linguistic choices made by broadcasters (of any medium) affect the nature of public debate?

— **Some work to get you started**

  * The film *Manufacturing Consent*, about the life and work of Noam Chomsky.

The move to make English the official language of the U. S.

Should English be the (only) official language of the U. S.?

— **Some questions to get you started** Have you had any personal experiences that are relevant to the question of whether English should be the official language of the U. S.? Where do other countries stand on the issue of national languages? What degree of influence do the government-run linguistic bodies of France and Iceland enjoy over how people actually use the language? If you were a stranger in a strange land, would you resent having to learn the language of that land?

— **Some work to get you started**

Language and the University

Some questions to get you started
Does UCSC have a speech code of any kind? If so, what is its nature? How has the discourse community defined by the University changed in the last few years? Have we seen such changes before in U. S. history? How does a field’s choice of terminology work to define who’s In and who’s Out? How do its terminology and its metaphors define the problems that the field addresses? How do they facilitate new insights? How might they hinder new insights?

Some work to get you started


Language disorders

Some questions to get you started
What are some prominent language disorders? What do we know about them? Do you have personal experiences with any of them? What can language disorders tell us about the way the brain processes language? How are language disorders relevant to education?

Some work to get you started


Standardized tests

Some questions to get you started
What kind of influence do standardized test scores have? Which traits does the popular culture view them as identifying? Which traits do their creators claim that they identify? Which traits do they actually identify? Are standardized tests a good thing? If not, how might be change or replace them?

Some work to get you started

- XXXX THAT BOOK BY LEMANN
- XXXX THAT NEW YORKER REVIEW OF LEMANN’S BOOK
The transformation of libraries

— Some questions to get you started  How has technology changed the way libraries work? Will libraries always exist as places that we visit physically? How do libraries go about translating their catalogues from print databases to electronic databases? What are the advantages of making this conversion? The disadvantages? How have libraries worked to accommodate new media (electronic files, websites, electronic archives, electronic newspapers, magazines, journals, etc.)?

— Some work to get you started

• The McHenry website

Language decline and death

At present, languages are dying out at a faster rate than ever.

— Some questions to get you started  Why are languages dying out so quickly? How does language death relate to imperialism? How does it relate to globalization? What are linguists doing to preserve languages? Why do some languages (e.g., Chinese, English, Spanish) enjoy such success, whereas others (e.g., Irish, Navajo, the Salish languages) struggle so much? For what reasons have languages died out in the past? Are those same reasons responsible for language death today? Are there advantages to increased linguistic homogeneity?

— Some work to get you started

• XXXX. 2001. *Vanishing Voices*. XXXX.
• XXXX THAT ARTICLE ABOUT EATING BUGS

Some other topics that sound good (see Chris for references)

1. Language and computers (How are natural and computer languages alike? How are they different? How far have computer scientists and linguists come in the attempts to get computers to understand natural languages?)

2. Gender-neutral language

3. The language of politics and political campaigns

4. The nature of libel and slander laws (in the U. S. or elsewhere)