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Professor Helmreich

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Dear Professor,

Honestly, when we started the first class, I did not think it would be so focused on the individual experiences pertaining to language. I was under the impression that it would just be another English class. I really wanted to do this topic because as I saw from how students reacted to readings and writings given in the class, we have all clearly experienced some kind of discrimination based on language once in our lives. This topic and experience actually changed my whole perspective on what future career I wanted to do. Before I had more of a STEM focus working for a private business and only has a light interest in working in the public sector but now I know that public policy is something I want to do for my whole life. Learning more about this topic and even reflecting on my own experiences and what means the most to me really expressed how little acceptance we have for people how are different down to the way they speak.

My audience is people who may have some insecurity about how they speak and how their speech deviates from Standard English. I also wanted to reach people who may not believe that language can be discriminatory. I mainly used logos and ethos to appeal to those who do not believe there is discrimination in language since I did not think this experience would be emotional enough to appeal to them. I tried to use everyday examples and show them that even an experienced person in this topic has these ideas that no English is imperfect. I also mentioned

my professor's credentials in the first paragraph so the audience could trust me more. I wanted to use pathos for people who were in my position don't feel that people who are not going through their experience. This is why I tried to use a lot of details in my story so they will empathize especially since it is probably not a topic that is brought up a lot in school.

This phase really added to my knowledge of how one person judging your accent in a language can remain with you can drastically change your personality. I knew it would have an effect but hearing the number of people who have the same experience as me of shutting down after they were judged really put into perspective how harmful some words can be. Also, understanding that English is a difficult language to master. There are so many things that don't have rules and if you try to find a rule, it just won't make sense especially with contractions. Coming from a background of speaking Patois, a dialect of English, English is really different depending on what type of English you speak even if it is the same root. I think when I learn a new language, I often see it as more fun than English and I tend to forget how many things in English just don't make sense. Other languages will have set rules that will apply to every part of the language which makes it hard to learn but easy to master if you are incorporated into the culture. One concept that impacted my entire perspective was how common code-switching was. I knew how common it was, but I did not realize how many different variations there are. It is not just changing your accent or dialect but changing your whole personality to cater to your audience.

The two-course learning outcomes that helped me the most with this phase's assignment was the 1st, "Recognize the role of language attitudes and standards in empowering, oppressing, and hierarchizing languages and the users, and be open to communicating across different languages and cultures," and 3rd, "Develop strategies for reading, drafting, collaborating,

revising, and editing” points. I think that the first learning outcome is very important because as I said I just started to experience professors actually breaking that stereotype of just talking about what they need to instead of what they should or want to. The way we feel towards language and how we treat certain dialects or languages can really change the way a group of people is treated in society. The third outcome also helped me develop my drafts and figure out how to write them. We don’t have to try so hard on drafts but at the same time, don’t rush them because a draft is still an advanced outline of your final writing.

My language, my literacy has not been filled with new and positive experiences like others. Oftentimes, my experiences regarding language have repeated themselves yet they still hold a special place in my heart. Strangely, the most recent moment in language has been the one that has changed my opinion the most on what language and literacy should be. I was one month and a half into my first semester of college, so everything was new to me, but this topic was something I never expected my professor to talk about. In a class focused on public service, my professor who is involved in Public Policy, and a faculty advisor of the MPA Program at City College brought up discrimination in language. From the way she described the topic of language, I could see how passionate she was about the subject. She is a person who you could immediately see that she not only cares about social issues but make it a goal to incorporate them in her lessons.

She started with the explanation of how the majority of NYC adults do not read above a reading level of 8th grade and they speak another language than English at home. We go through everyday life using phrases that seem harmless like “dumbing down” or casually telling people they should use proper English. Like many of the students in the class, we were confused with how many of our parents don’t speak Standard English, yet we used Standard English to almost show we were more educated than those who do not speak it. It was not just the way of speaking and whether it was proper or not, but she also brought up the idea of how certain vocabulary is used to limit people. Please, let us avoid using jargon that can be explained in simpler terms for the general public. She gave a presentation of how government officials will use complicated phrases like “Notice of Violation” or “Statutory Penalty” to describe something as simple as a “ticket” that everyone would understand. I understand the need for people to know those words to be able to read government documents but knowing words does not mean you will be able to

read well. Even people who read amazing and have an extensive vocabulary often skim. I would consider myself a good reader and even I find it exhausting to read the New York Times and even the “Terms & Conditions.” After her presentation, I started to do more research on how your level of literacy affects the way you are seen and how it makes you feel.

This experience had the most positive effects on my language and literacy ideas/skills and changed my interests the most. It was such a strong moment of realization and kind of embarrassment from not noticing sooner. I felt more guilt as the confusion started to wear off because I grew so accustomed to seeing these overly complicated words to describe something so simple and even feeling comfortable not reading terms and conditions. Like most people, I did not read them because they were so long and looked overwhelming. Even now after I am a little more careful of what I sign my name to, I still feel anxious when it comes to reading those long terms and conditions. At that time, I wished I wondered why they were made to look too compact and wordy. Was it really because we need all that information? Or did it have irrelevant details to turn us off? I firmly believe it is the latter like those websites or apps that claim you get “free money” but when you read the terms and conditions, it turns out you only get the money if you are over 99 years old or some other ridiculous expectation.

It was not just in documents or writing where she talked about this issue but also in everyday life when we talk to people. I managed to reflect on myself and how I treated others based on how they speak. It was definitely not an easy task and make me do a whole 180 on my reaction when I hear an accent or non-Standard English. It was important for me to understand that most professors do not promote Standard English because they think it is superior but simply because they know most people in our everyday life are not willing to accept that there should not be a standard. That presentation meant a lot to me because it was my first time hearing a

person of authority spoke that openly about how the education system promotes a standard. I thought it was something everyone should know and care about because whether we realize it or not, most of us have experienced some kind of judgement because of how we speak. It was nice to see how we truly overlook many phrases like “broken English” when someone does not sound like the standard.

I used this as a way to view people like my parents differently who have an accent and even trying to help people around me understand that there are not superior languages, words, or dialects. When she was giving the presentation, I thought it would be a hard concept to grasp because it brings up questions about what acceptable language in certain environments is. However, I think the issue is not finding what is acceptable and placing restrictions on people, but it is learning to accept whatever variations of English you hear and not see it as unusual. This was the main motivation for me to continue studying how language can put people who are different from the norm at a disadvantage.