

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology: Division of Humanities/Center for Language Education

HUMA 1000: Cultures and Values: **Cover sheet for final essay**

<b>Full name</b>	
<b>Student ID</b>	
<b>Writing workshop section number</b>	
<b>Writing workshop instructor</b>	
<b>Title of essay (please copy and paste from the document on Canvas)</b>	<b>The occurrence of multiple languages within a state stands in the way of national bonding and unity. In consequence, a common national language should be forged to enhance the development of a desired national identity. Do you agree with this claim? Why or why not?</b>

**Declaration:** The attached essay represents my own work. I have read and understood the University's policies on academic honesty and I confirm that the attached work conforms to these policies.

Please type your name:

**Response to feedback:** note here the comments from your instructor you have responded to (you can copy these from your feedback sheet).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Counterargument and refutation absent or faulty</b> The counterargument is rewritten with more logical and solid refutation.</li><li>• <b>Major coherence and/or clarity issues</b> It is about the first body paragraph. I have rewritten it and replaced unsuitable examples.</li><li>• <b>Conclusion ineffective</b> According to the advice of the instructor, I removed the part about the counterargument and rewrote the conclusion.</li><li>• <b>Unbalanced paragraph lengths</b> The counterargument is rewritten with appropriate length.</li></ul>
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Since the 1800s, nation states have formed all over the world. A nation is a cultural entity, so the unity of nations is key to the stability and safety the statehood. Some people think the existence of multiple languages with a state can harm the national unity and a common national language should be forged to solidify the national identity. However, I will demonstrate it is not true by arguing that the unification of a nation doesn't need a common language. To achieve this, I will first try to prove that language difference will not hinder national bonding and unity. Then I will show that other aspects of culture can also foster the construction of the national identity without the effect of a national language. In addition, opposite view will be presented and analyzed.

The existence of different languages within a state will not obstruct the unification of it. The bonding of a nation will not be significantly harmed by the existence of multiple languages within the border, which has been proved by the existence many multilingual countries. Switzerland is a typical example of them. There are four official languages in Switzerland, German, French, Italian and Romansh and the country is divided into four language zones geographically. After several wars and invasions in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century, the people living in the contemporary Switzerland region felt that they need to unify together to protect themselves from their European neighbors so they formed a federacy.<sup>1</sup> Instead of forging a common national language in Switzerland, the federal government set the four languages as the official language and required people from different language regions to study the language of another region. For example, a person in the German region needs to learn French and Italian at school. With the reservation of their own language in each region, Swiss people are still highly unified today. When I communicated with several German-speaking Swiss, they feel little German identity but strong Swiss identity. In fact, when talking about their country, Swiss people will proudly present their democratic political system, beautiful landscapes and their shared values as a nation. It is these factors that combined Swiss people together rather than language. From this example, we can see clearly that language difference is not harmful to national bonding. Therefore, language diversity will not weaken the national identity.

On the other hand, the construction of national identity can rely on other aspects of culture rather

a national language. The term culture contains many aspects like language, value, norms, etc. Many of them have an important effect on the construction of the national identity and this construction process doesn't necessarily involve the unification of language. This has been demonstrated by many cases that other aspects surpass language in the construction of national identity. A good example is China. According to the book *Language & national identity in Asia*, language didn't play an important ideological role in the growth of Chinese national identity.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, many elites at the period of the 1920s viewed Chinese as a negative factor of the building process of national identity. It should be other factors like common history, shared values and foreign invasion that lead to the formation of the Chinese nation. This assumption can be further corroborated by the national identity of Taiwan people. The political dispute has led to the separation of mainland China and Taiwan since 1949. People from the two places speak the same Chinese Mandarin which was proposed by the Republic of China before this separation. After the end of martial law in Taiwan, it has become a democratic society and mainland China stays in authoritarianism, which led to the differentiation of values of people in these two parts. In addition, Taiwan elites changed their history textbooks to waken the Chinese identity of their people. As a result, in 2009, less than 50% Taiwan people think they are Chinese.<sup>4</sup> In these two examples of China, we can see that without the emphasis on national language, national identity can still be constructed. Even with the same language, national identity can still be destroyed. Therefore, common national identity is not the necessary condition for the construction of national identity.

Some people may argue that from both ideological and utilitarian perspective, a common national language should be necessary for the construction of national identity.<sup>3</sup> However, such opinion has been long criticized as it is a Eurocentrism perspective, which is an induction based on observation on a limited number of samples. Ideologically, language can influence the way people think, but this effect is not deterministic and many other aspects of culture many play more prominent roles. As mentioned above in the example of Mainland China and Taiwan, Chinese language can shape the way people think in these two places similarly, but it is the history, political system and education that surpassed language and created cultural separation between people from these two places. Ideology may be affected by language, but other factors

can have a stronger impact. In terms of utility, the existence of various languages within a country is not a significant problem. According to the above-stated example of Switzerland, to cater to domestic use, Swiss people need to learn other Swiss languages except for their first language and this ratio is as high as 64%. In some cases, Swiss people would even use foreign languages like English to communicate with each other.<sup>4</sup> Despite the inconvenience of the existence of multiple national languages within Switzerland, Swiss people are still tightly united to each other as they are eager to communicate with their compatriots. Thus, the inconvenience in utility will not harm the unity of a nation. In short, from both ideology and utilitarianism point of view, construction of national identity doesn't necessarily require a common national language.

In general, it is shown that a common national language does not need to be forged to enhance national identity. On the one hand, language difference within one nation will not stand in the way of unification, which is proved by the existence of various nations with multiple national languages. On the other hand, other cultural factors like history, political system, and education may surpass language to be deterministic in the process of the formation of the bonding force of a nation.

## References

- (1) Switzerland <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland> (accessed Dec 6, 2017).
- (2) P, B. CC 101 Federal Constitution of 18 April 1999 of the Swiss Confederation <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995395/index.html#a4> (accessed Dec 6, 2017).
- (3) Simpson, A. Language and national identity in Asia; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007.
- (4) Taiwanese identity [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese\\_identity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese_identity) (accessed Dec 6, 2017).
- (5) How many Swiss regularly use at least four languages? [https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/multilingualism\\_how-many-swiss-regularly-use-at-least-four-languages-/42495614](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/multilingualism_how-many-swiss-regularly-use-at-least-four-languages-/42495614) (accessed Dec 6, 2017).