

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>	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?

**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).**

<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Your thesis statement prepares the reader for further argument (detail)</li></ul> <p><b>Body Paragraph 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You refer to course materials appropriately</li></ul> <p><b>Body Paragraph2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You refer to course materials appropriately (citation)</li></ul> <p><b>Counterargument</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You refer to course materials appropriately</li><li>- You refute the counterargument (overlap &amp; course materials)</li></ul> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Your conclusion clearly restates the main ideas in your essay (course materials)</li></ul>
--

**Summary of items that need your attention**

- No reference to course material
- Minor coherence/cohesion issues
- Formatting issues i.e. indents where not intended.

The occurrence of multiple languages in a state usually indicates its cultural complexity which comes with various cultural or ethnic identities. National bonding and unity is often hindered due to the miscommunication and segregation between different cultural groups. A national language, adopted and recognized by the government and its people, should therefore be forged to improve the cohesion in a nation. This essay is going to argue for the necessity of a national language in order to strengthen the development of a desired national identity by stating its advantages of lowering communication barrier, improving citizens' sense of belongings and later evaluating its effectiveness.

A common national language is necessary to facilitate communication and minimize friction between citizens of different backgrounds. A language can be said as a particular system of representation that mirrors and reinforces the 'world' of its speakers (Thomas et al., 2004). The existence of a language barrier could create a mental barrier and lead to conflicts. Malaysia is a multi-lingual country with three variations of identity: ethnic, national, and supranational which cause constant disputes among different groups (Gill, 2014). Germany is another country consists of different identities: Swabians, Saxons, and Frank, each with a distinct spoken dialect, causing great inconvenience and communications between the groups can only be aided by a single standard written language (Hobsbawn, 1996). Different languages are often accompanied by different values and attitudes towards certain matters, and not being able to convey them properly due to the presence of a language barrier are likely to give rise to misunderstandings and conflicts. Using the same language rather than communicating through translation can also minimize any miscommunication caused by meanings lost in translation or certain words and concepts that exist only in a culture but not in others. Creating a national language that includes specific words from different cultures should enhance communication between different cultural groups. Therefore, a uniform, national language is not only needed for effective communication, but is also crucial to form a mutual understanding among citizens of different cultural backgrounds.

Using the same language also helps developing a sense of belonging which in turn promotes the formation of a national identity. As social animals, humans tend to stay in a familiar group with shared traits to maintain a sense of security, meaning segregation of group identities is not purely geographical, but also virtual in terms of

language as it is an element of one's identity (Jackson, 2014). By sharing the same language, it is possible to create shared experience (e.g. collective memories) that is essential in forming one's cultural identity (Guibernau, 2004) or just a general sense of belonging towards the nation among different cultural groups. Besides, the knowledge of a national language is a kind of delegation of responsibility, reminding one of their national identity despite one's language background (Verschik, 2016). Citizens have to first acknowledge their nationality in order to establish a bond (be it emotional or not) with the community so as to separate the 'us' from the 'others', and eventually position themselves in the world as a collective with a uniform national identity. The keyword being 'eventually', given that a national identity cannot be fabricated overnight, but is to be constructed overtime, especially if the language is implemented in primary education which is a critical period for first language acquisition (Fromkin, 2014) which could strengthen the bond of the next generation. The purpose of a national language is simply providing common grounds for experience be shared, understanding be made, so that a national identity can be built.

Despite the advantages brought by having a common national language, concerns are raised of its detriment and effectiveness. Some consider it 'unfair' to make a particular language into the national language as it could make other existing languages obsolete. Yet, having an official national language does not necessarily mean forbidding the use of other languages and identities. There is no enforcement for one to use the official language at all times. In fact, China has 55 official ethnic minorities which usually undergoes Mandarin education, but their dialects are still in use and have not 'extinct' yet. In Taiwan, the official language is Mandarin Chinese, however, about 73% of the Taiwan population now still speak the group of Southern Min dialects that is usually known as Taiyu and other languages such as Hakka still exist (Klötter, 2004). It is possible to for multiple languages to coexist if their speakers intend to preserve them, but without one to lead, chaos ensues. If all the documentation in a company, or even the government, are done in different languages, it would be extremely inefficient to translate the documents into different versions of different languages. Hence, regardless of what the actual language citizens are using, an official, common national language is certainly needed.

Rome is not built in a day, and so is not a national identity. Multiple languages coexisting in a country without the lead of a common national language could cause

miscommunication and misunderstandings between different cultural and ethnic groups which caused much friction and further widens the gap between them. The establishment of an official common language is not aimed to eradicate or 'homogenize' other existing languages, but is to provide a way for groups to convey their ideas, experience and values to create reciprocated respect and appreciation within the country. With time, it shall smooth the discord and unite the nation as a while, developing a true national identity.

(907 words)

### Reference:

Fromkin, V. Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2014). *An Introduction to Language* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Publishing

Hobsbawn, E. (1996). *Language, culture, and national identity - multiculturalism based on language* [Nook version]. Retrieved from <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:LVNbW4MdGIwJ:www.serwis.wsjo.pl/lektor/1783/R7%2520HOBSBAWM%2520Lg%2520Culture%2520Nation.doc+&cd=1&hl=zh-TW&ct=clnk&gl=hk>

Jackson, J. (2014). Language and identity in intercultural communication. In N. D. Editor (Ed.), *Introducing language and intercultural communication* (pp. 129-147). N. D. :Routledge

Klöter, H. (2004). Language Policy in the KMT and DPP eras. *China Perspectives*. 56. ISSN 1996-4617.

Montserrat, G. (2004). *Nations and Nationalisms* [Nook version]. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1354-5078.2004.00159.x/full>

Saran, G. K. (2014). *Language Policy Challenges in Multi Ethnic Malaysia* [Nook version]. Retrieved from <http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789400779655>

Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Peccei, J. S., Thornborrow, J. & Jones, J. (2004). *Language, society and Power: An introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Routledge.

Verschik, A. (2016). *Estonia Human Development Report 2016/2017* [Nook version].  
Retrieved from <https://inimareng.ee/en/migration-identity-and-language-change/>