

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**

Full name	
Student ID	
Writing workshop section number	
Writing workshop instructor	
Title of essay (please copy and paste from the document on Canvas)	1. Language can influence our thoughts and values; by changing the way we talk, we can change the way we think. For instance, if we eliminate racist, sexist and other discriminatory terms from our language, we will become a less racist, sexist and less discriminatory society. Do you agree with this statement? 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).

- a lot of expositions are made and very few arguments are made
- course materials should be used in the topic sentence to support your arguments
- connection between proof and refutation is weak in the counter argument
- nouns cannot be used as justification for an argument or stance

Language, a representational system, facilitate the process of individuals transforming inward thoughts into outward communication. Not merely did language become the medium of expression, it was considered as the most powerful channel to influence our mind and perception. It is suggested that human language and our thought-grooves are mingled inseparably, or even regraded as the same thing (Salzmann, 2012). For instance, if we reconstruct our language system, we can remold our thoughts. Ideally, some people asserted that elimination of discriminatory terms from language could construct a society with less discrimination. However, the following essay will argue that language cannot wield such strong power to predispose our mind and alter stereotype in a society, because human thoughts are not simply shaped by one single factor of language. This will be proved by indicating how non-verbal codes replace and convey the verbal message and by displaying the existence of culture would shape persistent thoughts and thus inexorable discrimination, as well as social evolution impelling the creation of new thoughts.

A fundamental argument against language reconstruct thoughts is that non-verbal actions in human interaction can replace the eradicated negative wordings and reconstitute discrimination. Non-verbal is a hidden dimension of our daily communication (Hall, 1966), which non-verbal codes like body gestures and tonality behold indispensable and even more dominant roles than verbal codes in our interactions. According to Matsumoto, Frank, & Hwang (2013), nonverbal code takes the majority amount, 65% to 95%, of the total conveyed thoughts, demonstrating the existence of non-verbal message still convey idea like stereotype. Specifically, we take disability as an example. Disability discrimination are often happened in workplace, which colleagues often use offensive words and contempt their ability by using negative language. On the other hand, disabled employees could still receive discrimination from colleagues and managers by imposing boycotts, bullying, or keeping distance to disadvantaged, even we wipe out the disabled discriminatory words in our language. Disabled employees feel discriminated the most in the form of behavior but not language (Foster, 2007). Actions speak louder than words. Even we do not include disabled discriminatory terms in our language, behaviors still lead to a discriminatory situation in the society. Language can merely serve as a barrier of people getting access to discrimination, but it cannot become a thought influencer. Even we reduce harmful terms in our language, actions and behaviors still emerge as the carrier of spreading discriminatory idea in our society and restore discrimination.

Another argument would be language is ineffective to counteract the emergence of culture and customs that implanted permanent discriminatory thoughts. Different language system is created in different countries and ethnicity according to their different culture. In different culture, there would be an entirely different tradition, lifestyle, or habits, that they interact and live with a completely contrasting community, shaping a diverse way they think (Birner, 2012). The role of culture has brought an influential effect to how people thoughts. For the problem of racism, we take black people in America as an example. Black people are always the minority in the society of America. They will be discriminated in any channel, from school bullying to workplace discrimination. With reference to the survey deducted by Bertrand & Mullainathan (2004), the employers in Boston and Chicago often racially identify the applicants and the call back rates of same qualified black applicants was 50% lower than the white. The above discrimination apparently created by the history and culture of black being slaves in North America (Glenn, 2009). The deep-rooted culture of black racist in America cannot be easily eliminated by not calling them “nigger”. There are still myriad of ways for white Americans discriminating the black, since the culture has been shaped endemically within the region. Even teachers in America no more using “black” or “white” to educate kids dividing races, the culture of white predominating black in America cannot be annihilated. A deep-rooted culture would be a more authoritative factor than language to dominate human’s thought, especially when it comes to racism discrimination.

Language guides the society reality and our language habits in the community lead to particular choices of explicating our thoughts (Sapir, 1929). In the other words, filtering category of discriminatory words in language can determine the community not to perceive discrimination in their world. However, the above argument is shallow and over-optimistic, since evolution of the society will preclude the situation of language limiting thoughts. The world keeps evolving overtime; it is never possible for people using the same range and category of language set in their communication. People in new generation need to keep learning things new (Deutscher, 2010), which recognition of new items will still shape our new thoughts and language cannot pause it. In the case of sexism, people usually use offensive words and slangs, usually describing female sex organs, to humiliate them. Even we do not use these words in our language incipiently, we will still have the cognition of biological distinction between male and

female. The biological difference will elaborate a further social contrast in cultural traits and the society will subject the opposite sex with opposite life experiences (Tannen, 1990). Inequality in gender will be created slowly and thoughts of discrimination from a dominant sex towards the weaker sex will easily appear. These social phenomena are created by evolution and gradual recognition by human beings, that language cannot restraint human to develop thoughts like sexism.

In conclusion, language may be the most appropriate channel to communicate and transmit thoughts with others, but absolutely not an influencer of our thoughts and values. With the emergence of non-verbal behaviors, language cannot offset our negative thoughts and values, but only serves as a barrier to access such negative idea. Culture and history background would furthermore against the argument of language shaping thoughts, since language cannot control society's norms where a habitat or a tradition has been ingrained in the society. Also, with revolution of society, language cannot curb the creation of wordings about negative thoughts. Draw an analogy, a language deficit patient would not have a deficit in their thought (Schlenker, 2006), which they can still evolve their own mindset. Thus, language and thought should be taken distinctly and we should not simply think that changing language system can change human thoughts.

(1039 words)

Reference:

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