

Writing Assignment #2 Argumentative Essay (4-5 pages)

For this paper, you will be asked to think about the social, cultural, and political aspects of language, and to formulate a response to a current debate about language and society. Your essay should have a clear central thesis and a set of arguments and evidence to support your point of view. It should have a descriptive title and it should be 1.5 or double-spaced.

You may choose either of the following two topics. Use the three articles associated with the topic you choose as background. **You are not expected to do additional research for this paper.** The articles and chapters should provide you with sufficient background to help you develop your view about the issue.

We will be discussing some of these topics in the part of the course (when we discuss language acquisition, dialects and language change), so your thinking and writing on this topic are intended to prepare you for that discussion.

Topic #1

Most people are aware that biological species are becoming extinct at an increasing rate, and that this is happening everywhere on the planet. International organizations, research institutes, and foundations are involved in efforts to save endangered species by preserving and revitalizing their natural habitats. But another process of extinction is taking place that is not so well known—the dying out of languages. Likewise, there are individuals, communities, and organizations devoted to preserving endangered language “species”.

These efforts are not universally applauded, however. Even linguists themselves disagree about the cultural and political value, as well as the linguistic feasibility, of reviving or revitalizing a dying language.

What is your view? Are efforts to restore dying languages worthwhile and potentially feasible?

Drawing on what you have learned about language and linguistic theory in this class (morphology, phonetics and phonology, so far), as well as your own observations, ideas, and experiences (which might include what you've learned about your fieldwork language) — and using the sources — formulate a clear and well-argued position on this controversial question.

Sources:

- Michael Krauss (1992). The World's Languages in Crisis. *Language*.
- Peter Ladefoged (1992). Another View of Endangered Languages. *Language*.
- Steven Wurm (1991). Language Death and Disappearance: Causes and Circumstances. *Diogenes*.

Topic #2

We can see the political, social, and cultural significance of language in the intense controversies over national language policy that have arisen (and continue to arise) in countries throughout the world, and in the policies that different governments adopt. Contrasting examples include: the adoption of French as the sole official language of the Canadian province of Quebec in 1974; the long-standing official recognition of three languages (French, Swiss German, and Italian) in the multiethnic, multicultural country of Switzerland; and the ruthless suppression of Catalan, the primary language of the population of the Spanish province of Catalonia, under the dictatorship of Franco in 20th century Spain.

Here in the U.S., there has been a growing movement over the past two decades advocating a federal law to designate English as the official language of the nation. The idea behind this proposal is to require that English be the sole language of all government affairs (e.g., courts, taxes, elections) and of education. This movement is highly controversial.

What do you think? Should the U.S. adopt such a federal law? Alternatively, if you come from a country where there have been controversies over language policy, what is your view about them?

Using what you have learned about language and linguistic theory in this class, as well as your own observations, ideas, and experiences — and the sources — formulate a clear and well-argued position on this controversial question.

Sources:

- Robert King (1997). Should English Be the Law? *Atlantic Monthly*
- S.I. Hayakawa (2005). Bilingualism in America: English Should Be the Official Language. In *Language Awareness*.
- Dennis Baron (1990). An Official Language. In *The English-Only Question*.

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