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### Linguistic Identity Paper

One of the few commonalities among humans on Earth is the use of language. As an extremely effective means of communication, it can be said that language plays a crucial role in the establishment of interpersonal relationships, society, and even culture. For individuals, the significance of language begins even before birth, therefore, language is not only a practical tool but also a carrier of culture and an integral part of one's worldview.

When analyzing language as my tool, it exhibits diversity in kinds, forms, and situations when used. Personally, my primary language variety is Mandarin Chinese, which is the most widely used language in China. In addition to that, I also have experience with other languages, such as English, which I can speak and write relatively fluently as my second language; Inner Mongolian dialect, which I may not converse fluently but can understand others' meanings; Japanese, which I am familiar with some of the commonly used words due to watching anime. A particular language is not necessarily limited to specific situations; on the contrary, in most cases, languages are used interchangeably. In both Chinese and American schools, Mandarin Chinese and English are two primary languages that are frequently used. Mandarin Chinese is convenient for communication with friends, while English has a greater significance in academic-related topics. Many factors have contributed to my experiences in this regard, such as a relatively

favorable family economic situation, a genuine interest in English, an environment conducive to practicing English and so on. However, foremost among them is my parents' early emphasis on my English education during my elementary school years. Compared to other classmates in elementary school, I had earlier exposure to this language and dedicated more time and effort to learning it, which has laid a solid foundation for my future academic endeavors, including my study abroad experiences. Regarding whether I lean more towards written or spoken language, I'm actually not sure. When I finally had the opportunity to study education, which I was interested in, it was in an environment that didn't support me using my native language. The proficiency in my second language has left me unsure about my level of writing in my native language. During my time at BU, we had many opportunities for academic writing, but I couldn't express my thoughts intuitively in the language I'm most proficient in. The process of translating from Chinese to English in my mind undoubtedly hindered my train of thought, preventing me from fully presenting my viewpoints.

Culture and language can be used to mutually interpret each other, the influence of language on individual culture is not necessarily limited to language alone. "This connection ... can also be found in the linguistic identities of children who have had stories or aspects of culture passed down to them that link their family to the language." (Dressier, 2014, p.48). Both of my parents are from Inner Mongolia, and attended university in Beijing. They are fluent in both the Inner Mongolian dialect and Mandarin Chinese. However, as the only child in my family tree who grew up in Beijing, I am not proficient in using our family's language. The language barrier leads to everyone in my family having to speak Mandarin Chinese to me whenever we gather for Chinese New Year back in our hometown. It represents a suppression of

dialects by the dominant language, yet despite this, the culture of Inner Mongolia is still transmitted to me through language. This transmission primarily manifests in behavioral habits, such as certain dietary customs, lifestyle routines, specific rituals (like scheduled ancestral worship), which most of my friends who grew up in Beijing have never heard of or cannot comprehend. When I first encountered English and dialects, my initial reaction was confusion, but I could sense that they were attempting to communicate with me. As we engaged in discussions about language and related topics in the classroom, I began to reflect on whether there was a connection between language and culture. “Language has been redefined as an integral part of the culture with which it is associated.”(Max S, 1973, p.340). It seems that this connection is natural, and indeed it is. However, when we step out of this mindset, language is simply a systematic arrangement of sounds formed through specific nasal shapes and vocal cord vibrations. Especially when we find ourselves in an environment where we are using a language other than our first language, we can better appreciate the sensation of language detached from culture. Therefore, in order for language to have meaning, the first step is to use it within the community and over time transmit the culture of each generation through language as a carrier.

The boundary between learning and acquiring language is quite blurry for me. Due to my strength in English during primary and middle school, classmates often approached me for clarification and help before exams. However, when they brought up terms like “relative clauses”, “past continuous tense”, or “present perfect continuous tense”, I couldn't clearly explain the connections between them and everytime I just simply answered based on “intuition”. This phenomenon reflects the distinction between language learning and language acquisition. “... older learners draw on their problem-solving and metalinguistic abilities

precisely because they can no longer access the innate language acquisition ability they had as young children.” (Lightbown, 2021, p.24). Compared to other students, I was exposed to English at a stage when my language system was not yet fully formed, which led English to become a part of it. However, those who started learning English in third grade or even later could only understand English through the mindset of learning Chinese, which in itself is perplexing because languages are mutually independent. As for the connection between language and my anticipated future work, I believe that aside from providing the foundation for communication with my patients, the greatest contribution it offers is broadening my worldview. Only by viewing the world can one form a worldview. It is precisely because of English and the support of my family that I am able to experience this distinctive life. Although my experiences may not directly relate to my future patients, they remind me constantly of life's diversity and the necessity of maintaining emotional stability.

In conclusion, language is diverse in various senses, bringing different meanings to each of us. For my future career, language also prepares me, both on the surface and psychologically, to make me always remember the diversity of life, and approach my patients with a perspective of utmost inclusivity and understanding. I look forward to seeing what adventures language will bring me in the journey ahead.

## References

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