

Name:
Period:

Language Identity - Thoughtstarter

Part I: Brainstorm

Directions: Answer the question in at least 5 complete sentences.

What language(s) do you speak? Do you feel that your language makes you who you are?

What power is afforded to your use of English? Other languages?

Do you feel that you should change your language? When and under what circumstances?

Part II: Source Analysis

Directions: Read and annotate the given sources.

Source 1: "The 'American's Speak English' Debate is Not About English At All"

Author: Emaan Majed

Date: 10/1/2015

One of the unifying moments at the last GOP debate was when the candidates agreed that in America, people should speak English, to raucous applause. It came on the heels of Bobby Jindal's declarations in the first debate that "immigration without assimilation is invasion." The Republican candidates were were echoing a sentiment that **Americans are largely getting behind**, one that reflects the immigration panic increasingly prevalent in America.

But the "Americans Speak English" debate is not about English. It's not even about Spanish, illegal immigration, or assimilation. In fact, whether or not immigrants learn English isn't that important to the "Learn English" crowd; the truth is, immigrants are learning English, at **much faster rates** than European immigrants a century ago were. For much of this inflamed "'speak English!'" nativist crowd, even going to lengths to do what they say isn't enough. My father, an immigrant, spent years mastering English, but that doesn't stop many Americans from expressing mockery and disgust at South Asian accents like his.

National unity doesn't particularly factor in either. If it did, then all immigrants, regardless of country of origin, would be placed under the same scrutiny. In reality, America cherry-picks the immigrants it hassles about assimilation. We treat the languages of immigrants from western, European, white countries as fun and interesting. We see their people as civilized and therefore not needing to assimilate to the same degree. European languages and accents are given a respect entirely absent in Americans' approaches towards other foreign languages.

Many immigrants will be quick to tell you their **stories of how lost job offers, daily scorn and discrimination** follow when they reveal an immigrant origin through their words or accent. Some immigrants, however, don't have to hide their heritage at all to have a chance in America: Americans can't get enough of British accents, which British immigrants sometimes emphasize for their professional good. A 2015 Pew Research Center survey found that out of all immigrant populations, European immigrants **were seen as least threatening** with only 9 percent percent of Americans viewing their impact on American society as negative, compared to Middle Easterners' 39 percent percent, Latinos' 37 percent percent, Africans' 22 percent percent, and Asians' 11 percent percent. Unsurprisingly, this finding divided along racial lines, with white Americans by far the most likely to view immigrants groups negatively.

The national dialogue on language, which focuses on the Mexicans, the Muslims, the Syrians, and other populations we find most menacing barely manages to mask racial hostility. Our suspicion about Middle Eastern peoples, for example, runs so deep that we are unwilling to take in thousands of war-torn refugees because our first reaction towards them is distrust, regardless of **whether they may actually be a threat**.

Many Americans' anger toward immigrants is so pronounced that even speaking a language other than English can get you labeled an un-American heretic, **as Jeb Bush found out**. Commentators and politicians love to discuss the **evils of multiculturalism**, and immigrants are told from all sides that they should be integrating into "American society"—whatever that means. If immigrants live and work in a country they love and whose principles they respect, what is there for them to assimilate into? What part of speaking Spanish to one's parents or going to Eid celebrations is un-American in a country whose very fabric is made of multiculturalism? By couching our sentiments in issues less offensive on the surface, such as whether immigrants should speak English, we have allowed a level of xenophobia and racism to creep into our society that wouldn't be out of place in a dystopian movie.

The real issue is not English, but these people's ethnicities and their presence here, a reality America does not know how to or want to deal with. Language is one of those things that often hides deeper issues, and in this case our national preoccupation with English is a stand-in for nativist frenzy. Let's be honest about what we're really asking of these immigrants when we tell them to speak English: to not threaten our fragile, racially based American ideal, to pull a Jindal on ourselves and disavow and be ashamed of any culture that is not white or descended from white immigrants.

What is the author's claim?

How do you know? Provide a quote that supports this claim:

Source #2: "Lose Your Language Lose Your Tribe"

Author: Andre Cramblit

Date: 3/18/2016

February 21 was International Mother Language Day. It is a day to celebrate the diversity of the world's languages and to support each other in the battle to retain this most important part of who we are. All Natives should take time everyday to reconnect with, learn or share the language. Learn a word or phrase every week, use it as often as possible and then teach it to someone else.

I am chair of the Karuk Language Restoration Committee (KLRC). We are a group of interested community members, Tribal and non-Native, that shares a love of the language and work to restore it to vibrancy. We have been working together since I came home from college in 1986. The KLRC helps set the policies, teaching strategies and develop grant proposals to ensure we have a vibrant language program for our future generations.

Like many Tribes, the language of the Karuk people stands at the precipice of oblivion. We are the second largest tribe in California with around 4000 members but have only a precious handful of less than 10 fluent speakers. It is a truism but each time an Elder speaker passes we lose a dictionary of words and language resources as well as an encyclopedia of cultural knowledge. It is another cliché, but one rooted in truth, that there are some concepts and tenets of culture that cannot be translated into English. Wellness, for Native people, is based upon the inter-connectedness of the physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional health of the people, and language is the binding agent that connects all of those into a culture.

An anonymous quote I often use is extremely harsh, but also painfully accurate in my honest opinion. "If you lose your language you are no longer a member of your tribe but rather a descendant of tribal members." The ability to think, speak, dream and pray in your language is what connects us to our ancestors and cultural heritage. It is this link that upholds the health and wellness of the Native community. Language is the method of transferring our traditional knowledge to future generations...

... As Natives we share the common history of linguistic genocide. Our people have had their languages brutally taken from them by government policy and western pressure to assimilate. You owe it to the people of your family and Tribe who have gone on before you to take a stand to maintain your language so the poetry, wisdom and cultural knowledge of your mother tongue is preserved for the benefit of those yet to come. Be ready to encourage (in some cases cajole or challenge) the Tribal Council to

fund your efforts even when there is not a particular grant for language. Help ensure that language is a major priority for your Tribe.

What is the author's claim?
How do you know? Provide a quote that supports this claim:

Part III: Argument and Personal Response

Directions: In the space provided, write an argumentative paragraph highlighting the argument made in one of these resources. Be sure to properly include textual evidence and explanations (warrants for Honors). Then, write a second paragraph that continues the claim but takes a personal perspective; how does this perspective on language affect you? Do you agree or disagree with this claim? How? Provide examples from your own life.
