

Discussion Questions: Language Ideologies

Language ideologies are beliefs, either conscious or unconscious, that people have about their language(s) or about language in general. Different people have different language ideologies, and different ideologies are dominant in different cultures. When you reflect on your own language ideologies and compare them with other people's, you can have more positive interactions with people beliefs may differ from yours.

For this exercise, you'll start by asking yourself some specific questions about language, in order to explore some of your own language ideologies. Then, you'll compare your beliefs with those of your classmates. Next, you'll compare your beliefs with an exchange partner. Finally, you'll reflect on similarities differences: How much are language ideologies different because each person is unique, and how many differences are more likely to be cultural?

Fill in your answer to all of the questions. Then, share and exchange answers to all questions with a classmate. After that you'll have a whole-class discussion about your findings before you talk with your exchange partner. Finally, revisit each question again to write any final reflections and findings.

Question 1: Do you think that some language varieties are better than others? For example, is standard classroom English more precise than informal, slang English?

My answer:
My classmate's answer:
My exchange partner's answer:
Reflections on similarities/differences:

Question 2: Is there anything you think is especially beautiful, special, or important about your first language(s)? How about the language(s) you are learning?

My answer:
My classmate's answer:
My exchange partner's answer:
Reflections on similarities/differences:

Question 3: How do you feel about people who are learning your first language(s)? Are you glad that they are interested in learning it?

My answer:
My classmate's answer:
My exchange partner's answer:



Reflections on similarities/differences:
--

Question 4: Languages change from generation to generation. In your opinion, is this a good thing, or something to be resisted?

My answer:
My classmate's answer:
My exchange partner's answer:
Reflections on similarities/differences:

Question 5: Do you think it's ever appropriate to use swear words? If so, when? Who should use them (for example, is it OK for small children, or teachers in classrooms?)?

My answer:
My classmate's answer:

My exchange partner's answer:
Reflections on similarities/differences:

Question 6: How do you feel when someone who is learning your first language uses a lot of slang, or uses a variety that's usually used by one particular group of people (for example, Black Vernacular English)?

My answer:
My classmate's answer:
My exchange partner's answer:
Reflections on similarities/differences:

Question 7: When a young child makes a mistake in his/her first language (for example, “goed” instead of “went”), does it do any good to correct him/her? What about when an older person makes a mistake in a language he/she is learning?

My answer:
My classmate’s answer:
My exchange partner’s answer:
Reflections on similarities/differences:

Final reflection: Had you ever thought about any of these questions before? Were you surprised at anyone’s beliefs? How much do you think culture influences language ideologies? Will anything you learned in this activity change the way you interact with people who speak a different first language?