City University of New York (CUNY)

# CUNY Academic Works

2019

# Language Awareness and About Me

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**ABSTRACT**
**LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND ABOUT ME**
**Assignment Description**

**FYS Discipline:**

Liberal Arts: Social Sciences and Humanities

**Objectives of the Assignment:**

Showcase students' skills or interests in languages other than Standard English as part of the About Me statement in the ePortfolio. The assignment addresses many students in a typical FYS classroom at LaGuardia Community College. It encourages:

- Students with a native ability in another language to see it not as a stumbling block to learning but as a resource to develop academically and professionally

- Native English speakers to explore other world languages and cultures, and to consider using their interest professionally

- All students to consider whether they have experience with a dialect or slang, texting language and emojis, professional or technical language, or other specialized vocabulary, and whether this experience is (or should be) part of their emerging identity that they should cultivate

In addition, the assignment encourages students to use their own judgment in deciding how to integrate it with the rest of their statement so it increases its overall impact and their own investment in the assignment.

**Amount of Time to Complete the Assignment:**

The assignment unfolds over several weeks and follows the steps below:

**Week 1:** Introduce the About Me assignment. Work with students in brainstorming, planning, writing, and revising the statement so they find a compelling "story" to tell. Three paragraphs are a good length to aim for, perhaps present, past, and future. Also make a separate email exercise one of the first assignments you do in class (or Studio Hour), so students know how to access their LaGuardia email and can contact you by email. It is a good idea to incorporate this with instruction and practice in email etiquette.

**Week 2:** Students should have posted their statement to their ePortfolio. Review the statement and use the Pages icon on it to write a response to statement with suggestions for revising. Email the student that the response is waiting and they should open their portfolio, read the response, and follow the directions.

**Week 3:** Reserve a computer room for the day they are going to find the email, access the response in the ePortfolio, and begin revising. Tell students to email you when they have finished revising. They will then receive full credit for the assignment.

**Week 4:** Return to the revised statement for Language Awareness assignment. Distribute Part I of the assignment to introduce the project and generate discussion. This will take an hour or a little more. Part II can then be completed in the remainder of the second hour. Students can also finish Part II at home by an assigned date.

**Percentage of the Final Grade:**

The original About Me statement is worth slightly more than the Language Awareness project building on it because of the additional work involved (composing, revising, emailing, etc.). However, both are relatively low-stakes assignments included among about fifteen to twenty ePortfolio assignments and roughly the same number of in-class assignments.

## Reflection

The assignment is designed to help students find common interests in language. I went into it expecting some resistance, especially from native speakers who might not see its importance for them. By scaffolding the assignment over several weeks and making it part of a larger context, though, I think all students have more interest and investment in their work. Also emphasize the many options students have and decisions they are encouraged to make in highlighting their own language awareness. A visual art student can create a banner of characters, an education major can demonstrate the many languages she can greet students in a preschool she works at, a student can show off the slang or Jamaican patois he uses with his friends, etc.

Also, it's important to stress that simple interest in another language or culture, or any knowledge of even a few words or phrases, is valuable. Language refers to any kind of shared vocabulary or speaking/writing such as texting, dialect, professional vocabulary, etc. The goal is that students come to see not only that there is an immense diversity of languages in a typical FYS classroom, but that they share in this diversity and they can use these interests and skills in their professional development.

Finally, you will notice in the project announcement to the class that Google Translate is suggested as a tool to generate translations. This is added mostly to give students who don't feel like they have anything to offer or any language resources an opening to participate in the project. A good number of students in your class will have a language other than English (or several) to work with. If you accentuate the value of seeing texting, dialect, slang and professional vocabulary as distinct languages, hopefully some students who will try this route, too. There may be a few, though, who don't have another language to work with and who hesitate to try something else. Google Translate gives these students an option to work with.

This could be a good opportunity, as well, to introduce students to the growing use of machine-based translations and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. For example, show them an article in English and its translation into a language at least several students in the class are familiar with. Then ask these students to describe the accuracy and inaccuracy of the translation to the rest of the class and give examples. Most likely there will also be students in your class who use Google Translate and can demonstrate to the class its limitations. Finally, you could keep track of who uses Google Translate in the project and see if another student can check the translation and suggest revisions.

**LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND THE ABOUT ME STATEMENT: PART I**

Language is all around us. It is like the air we breathe, but have you ever thought that we are also constantly surrounded by multiple languages? We see, hear, and perhaps even speak different languages wherever we go as we move around campus, our neighborhood, our workplace, and greater New York. (The word "language" here is very broad. It includes world languages like Spanish or Korean, but it can also mean slang, a specialized scientific or professional vocabulary, etc.) These languages and the people who use them aren't as different as we might be inclined to think, though. We see signs that convey the same message in several languages, for instance. We see people switching from one language to another without a pause, too, often in the same sentence. We may even do this ourselves or we often have friends, relatives or coworkers who do.

**DIRECTIONS**

Work with your partners to answer these questions. Be ready to discuss them with the class:

1. What languages do the members of your group know?
   _____

2. What languages do you have an interest in learning? Why?
   _____

3. How does knowledge of another language help us understand other people?
   _____

   _____

4. How do you think knowledge of another language can help a professional in:
   a. Teaching
   _____
   b. New media technology
   _____
   c. Music
   _____
   d. Journalism or creative writing
   _____
   e. International studies
   _____
   f. Health care
   _____
   g. Theater
   _____
   h. Fine arts
   _____
   i. Political science
   _____

5. The idea of "language" includes slang, texting and emojis, professional or technical language, and other specialized vocabulary. What other kinds of languages do the members of your group have some proficiency in? Explain and be prepared to give examples.

# LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND THE ABOUT ME STATEMENT: PART II

Here is another project we can work on that will help us become aware of the linguistic diversity we all inhabit. It will help open our ears and perhaps even help us to use our own linguistic resources to communicate and enrich the lives of everyone:

1. ABOUT ME REFLECTION PROJECT: Now that you have composed the reflection statement and received feedback on it, think of how you can incorporate at least one other language. (Remember that we are taking a very broad view of language, so we include slang, professional vocabulary, etc. with the traditional notion of world languages.) Perhaps you can write a sentence or phrase in a language you are familiar with. You can also use Google Translate to find the phrase in another language you don't know but are interested in. Remember that we want to stretch and open up our readers' awareness, but we also want to look for ways to use the phrase without confusing them too much, either. Provide some kind of context so they can guess its meaning or follow with a transition. For example, you might write "In other words" after the phrase and then express it in everyday English.

2. ABOUT ME QUOTE: After you find a quote you want to include on your About Me page, translate it into another language either on your own or by using Google Translate. Think of using a different language than the one you used in the reflection. Also try using a specialized slang that you are familiar with and readers would love to learn a little about. Again, make a judgment call that your readers will understand that you are opening their ears to another language in a friendly and nonthreatening way.

**How to Use Google Translate:** 1. Go to translate.google.com, 2. Copy and paste the text you want to translate or write it in yourself in the box on the left; 3. Click the downward arrow on the right to choose the language you want to translate the passage into; 4. Copy and paste the translation into your statement.