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Case Study: An Urban Bilingual [Linguistics]

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ELN 101: Introduction to Bilingualism

Assignment Title: Case Study: An Urban Bilingual

Assignment Description

The assignment *Interview with a Bilingual: Case Study* is a midterm, high-stakes written research paper in ELN101: *Introduction to Bilingualism*, a course contributing one deposit into the Global Learning Core Competency and Written Communication Ability. The assignment calls for the consideration and application of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic concepts into the discussion of individual multilingualism. By completing this assignment, students gain a deeper understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity in the US society. They learn to position issues in bilingualism against a global backdrop through the consideration of an individual bilingual journey as representative of similar histories and perspectives elsewhere. As such, the assignment asks students to approach the challenges and opportunities afforded by multilingual experience from multiple perspectives and engage with issues of diversity, identity, power, and privilege.

ELN101: *Introduction to Bilingualism* is a course housed in the Linguistics Program in the Department of Education and Language Acquisition. It is a writing-intensive, urban study, ePortfolio course offered in two modalities – face-to-face and hybrid. The course also fulfills LaGuardia’s urban study graduation requirement. ELN 101 is depositing for Liberal Arts: Social Science & Humanities and four options in Liberal Arts at the midpoint for the Global Learning Core Competency and Written Communication Ability. Students in the course have typically taken the ENG 101-102 sequence and many liberal arts majors are concurrently enrolled in ENG 103: *The Research Paper*. The ENG sequence of courses provides an introduction to the skill of writing with power and clarity – the ability to combine vocabulary with grammatical proficiency, fluency, and cogent organization. The ELN 101 course, also attracting diverse cohorts of students from outside the Liberal Arts majors, including Business, Computer Science, and Natural Science majors, continues this task of teaching writing in the liberal arts tradition, emphasizing, in turn, the writing conventions of social sciences.

The assignment *Interview with a Bilingual: Case Study* takes several weeks to complete as it incorporates an authentic primary research experience for community college students. Students are introduced to the qualitative research paradigm through the case study methodology. To complete the assignment, students design an interview scheme, conduct individual interviews, analyze data, and present findings in written case study reports. The assignment is worth 15% of the final grade. The assignment in its earlier and the revised versions has been implemented in ELN 101 for a number of years. For the majority of students taking the course this is one of the highlights of the course because, typically, they interview bilinguals who have been in their lives (i.e., friends and relatives). Students report learning unexpected, new, and surprising facts and events from the lives of their intimate friends and family members. Students also report enjoying primary research experience afforded by this assignment, usually their first experience analyzing primary data in a college class. By the same token, being the first-time experience, data analysis poses the biggest challenge in the assignment and is accompanied by multiple staged assignments during which students receive ongoing feedback from the instructor.

The assignment in its final version has benefitted from the feedback of LaGuardia colleagues coordinating and participating in the Learning Matters Mini-Grant 2018-2019.

Assignment

Research Paper #1
Case Study: An Urban Bilingual

Researchers strive to systematically collect data in order to create accurate descriptions of the social world. This allows them to draw conclusions about why people act the way they do in all types of situations and in relation to other people. For this qualitative research paper, you will systematically collect data through your interview with a functional bilingual. In going through this process, you will experience how social scientists transform data they collect into a written case study research paper.

In writing this research paper, imagine you are educating your fellow LaGuardians—monolingual, bilingual, multilingual alike—on the dimensions of what it means to be someone who uses more than one language. Give your readers the necessary context or background information throughout the paper to help them follow your discussion. If you use any terms that would be unfamiliar to your readers, make sure to define them.

Your task:

In this research paper, respond to the prompt below:

Based on the personal perspective shared by the person you interviewed, what is the experience of a bilingual in an urban place like New York City? Select and discuss three aspects of the bilingual experience from the responses of your participant. Be sure to support your discussion with a specific reference to the words of the interviewee and to the concepts covered in class. Conclude your paper by reflecting on the central question of this assignment, “What is unique about the experience of the person you interviewed, an urban bilingual?”

Process stages for this assignment

1. Select the person to be interviewed (the functional bilingual you interview may not be your classmate in ELN 101; inform the instructor if you have difficulties locating a local bilingual).
2. Develop your questions for the online assignment; select the most appropriate questions for your case study from the list posted on the course ePortfolio.
3. Schedule, conduct, and audio-record the interview; transcribe the answers.
4. Code the transcript, looking for recurring similar themes into categories; detect consistent and overarching themes (examples will be shown in class).
5. Select three themes/aspects of the bilingual experience in the responses of your participants to be discussed in your paper and select appropriate quotes from your participant. Submit the transcript and the three aspects as your next online assignment.
6. Write the first draft of your paper following the IMRD structure (suggestions on how to organize the paper will be distributed in class); revisit it in a day or two and revise it; make sure to end the paper with a reflection on your research process and what you learned through this primary research study.
7. Submit the paper; expect feedback.
8. Discuss revision strategies with the instructor; revise and be ready to post the final version on e-portfolio.

Format:

This research paper should be 4-5 pages long (without the interview transcript) and should have the canonical organization introduced in class. Check the syllabus for how to format this assignment. Append the interview transcript.

Grading system:

The research paper will be evaluated according to the following criteria: (1) Accurate understanding of the concepts and fulfillment of the assignment; (2) Analysis and development; (3) Organization and coherence; (4) Awareness of audience and use of appropriate tone; and (5) Overall clarity of language.