

# Personal Language Inventory

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## Engaging Educators in Self-reflexive Language Use Inquiry

### Abstract

This guide will help teacher educators to use literature that discusses the language experiences of minoritized communities to consider their own ideas about language, and how these ideas can facilitate their interactions with students in classrooms. We believe this assignment provides one way to have any learner document the varying ways language is used in their lives, the sociopolitical implications of their languages, and how these languages have impacted them and their families.



**Branch Alliance  
for Educator Diversity**

REDEFINING QUALITY EDUCATOR PREPARATION

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## Purpose

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This assignment will help TEs and PSTs to use literature that discusses the language experiences of minoritized communities to consider their own ideas about language, and how these ideas can facilitate their interactions with students in classrooms. It is important for future and current teachers to reflect on what language means to them in their everyday lives in order to create a linguistically inclusive learning experience. It is also important for them to provide their students with a linguistically affirming learning experience. We believe this assignment provides one way to have any learner document the varying ways language is used in their lives, the sociopolitical implications of their languages, and how these languages have impacted them and families. This assignment can help facilitate that process and supports the expansion of students' conceptions of language and language users.

Additionally, the reading of literature that explicitly highlights linguistic diversity can expose future teachers to ideas and experiences similar to their own, providing a culturally relevant and sustaining learning experience. They can also provide students without similar experiences with a moment to reflect on how they will prepare future students who are culturally and linguistically different in ways that support culturally relevant and sustaining practices

## Background

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With increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the U.S., it is imperative for educators to develop tools and processes to learn about their students' cultural and linguistic assets and leverage these assets as resources for learning. However, educators must first come to know themselves as dynamic cultural and linguistic beings and situate their experiences within a sociopolitical context. The Linguistic and Cultural Autobiography Project (LCAP) with primary investigator, Dr. Steven Athanases at UC Davis, examined education students' use of the personal language inventory--one of several self-reflexive inquiry tools employed in a course on education and diversity--to facilitate examination of education students' own linguistic experiences and backgrounds as a foundational process for preparing future educators to affirm linguistic diversity. We highlight findings from two of the studies from this project.

Banes, Martinez, Athanases & Wong (2016) explored a course on Cultural Diversity and Education serving 76 culturally and linguistically diverse undergraduate students, many of whom planned to become teachers. Through analysis of the Personal Language Inventory and other assignments and surveys, authors captured the varied beliefs and ideas these diverse students hold about language, prompted by reflective activities, including the impact of their experiences with linguicism and the tensions and variations they report on dominant language ideologies. Highlighted are potential openings for deeper understandings of the often-unexposed language ideologies of potential teachers before and as they enter teacher preparation programs is a necessary first step toward developing coursework and experiences that will help guide them toward more expansive views of language. Such expansive views may impact future teachers' practices and student learning opportunities, particularly important in classrooms of linguistically diverse learners.

Athanases, Banes, Wong, and Martinez (2019) examined 262 undergraduate students' (majority students of color; half bilingual) use of self-reflexive inquiry processes to document their own and others' language use. The personal language inventory was a primary process for language documentation and reflection. Many students noted this was the first time they analyzed their own language. Students reported how their language(s) were shaped by a diverse range of contexts including with friends or family as interlocutors; settings including university, work, or teaching; and cultural/racial groups in larger social settings. Students often conceived of language as "formal" and/or "informal" while simultaneously complicating these ideas about language and context, illustrating fluidity of language use across contexts. Students situated their linguistic repertoires in a sociopolitical context as they reflected on experiences in writing and dialogued with diverse peers.

# Assignment: Personal Language Inventory for Critical Self-Reflection About One's Own Language Use

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Summary of Personal Language Inventory Assignment Process:

1. Read Amy Tan's essay, "Mother Tongue." In addition, select a language-focused research article from the list provided. These texts provide insight into different concepts including communicative repertoires, language ideologies, raciolinguistics, and responsive scaffolding.
2. Document different languages used over the course of one week.
3. Write a reflection with analysis about language(s) and versions used in different contexts and ideas you and others have about language with connections to course reading.
4. Share in class.

## Resources

de Oliveira, L. C., & Athanases, S. Z. (2017). A framework to re-envision instructional scaffolding for linguistically diverse learners. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61(2), 123-129.  
<https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jaal.663>

Flores, N. (2020). From academic language to language architecture: Challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in research and practice. *Theory into Practice*, 59(1), 22-31.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00405841.2019.1665411>

Martinez, D. C. (2017). Imagining a language of solidarity for Black and Latinx youth in English language arts classrooms. *English Education*, 49(2), pp. 179-196.

## Additional Literature about Language

Santa Ana, O. (Ed.). (2004). *Tongue-tied: The lives of multilingual children in public education*. Rowman & Littlefield

## References

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- Athanases, S. Z., Banes, L. C., Wong, J. W., & Martinez, D. C. (2019). Exploring linguistic diversity from the inside out: Implications of self-reflexive inquiry for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 70(5), 581-596. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022487118778838>
- Banes, L. C., Martinez, D. C., Athanases, S. Z., & Wong, J. W. (2016). Self-reflexive inquiry into language use and beliefs: Toward more expansive language ideologies. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 10(3), 168-187. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19313152.2016.1185906>

# Appendix

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## Personal Language(s) Inventory

Professor Steven Athanases, UC David, Edu 150, [szathanases@ucdavis.edu](mailto:szathanases@ucdavis.edu)

### Assignment:

- Read “Mother Tongue” and select any two research articles listed below.
- Keep a language inventory for the next week.
- Be prepared to discuss in class next week what you noticed.
- Write up your reflection (including notes on form provided).

### Read this week to guide your inventory notetaking:

- **Inspiration for the activity:** Amy Tan’s essay “Mother Tongue.”
- **This language inventory assignment is at the heart of data analyses for these two papers, included at journal website for the first and as appendix for the second:**
- Athanases, S. Z., Banes, L. C., Wong, J. W., & Martinez, D. C. (2018). Exploring linguistic diversity from the inside out: Implications of self-reflexive inquiry for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 70(5), 581-596.  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022487118778838>
- Banes, L. C., Martinez, D. C., Athanases, S. Z., & Wong, J. W. (2016). Self-reflexive inquiry into language use and beliefs: Toward more expansive language ideologies. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 10(3), 168-187.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19313152.2016.1185906>

### Also, to inform the reflective writing due:

- Flores, N. (2020). From academic language to language architecture: Challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in research and practice. *Theory into Practice*, 59(1), 22-31.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00405841.2019.1665411>
- de Oliveira, L. C., & Athanases, S. Z. (2017). A framework to re-envision instructional scaffolding for linguistically diverse learners. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61(2), 123-129. <https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jaal.663>

### Conduct a language inventory of your own language uses:

- Use and expand the notetaking sheet in this document over the next week, starting today!
- Be prepared to discuss patterns in your inventory next week during breakout session.
- **Context:** Think about all the different languages you use in the course of a week. This includes completely different languages, as well as different versions of English (or any other language) that you use in specific contexts: for example, language you use with children versus language you use with peers or colleagues, or the language you use with family versus the language you use with your friends, or the language you use in some social contexts versus the language you use in other contexts. You may want to think of a language as different from another if the use of it would cause confusion, bewilderment, criticism, or judgment with the “wrong” group.

### Some questions to prompt your discussion and writing:

- What did you think about Tan's claims?
- Do you have experiences that compare with Tan's?
- How much of the transcription of Tan's mother's narrative did you understand (page 1)?
- How different are languages you speak (within a given language if you speak 2 or more)?
- Which two languages or language variations are the most different, and what makes them so different?
- How does this impact your ability to express yourself in different contexts?
- Have you noticed others' perceptions of you, based on your language use?
- Have you ever felt judged as inferior based on your language use?
- Do language dialects and accents play a role in your language experiences?
- Think about how your different “languages” differ from “standard English,” if they do.
- Are the differences due to syntax and/or vocabulary?
- Are there differences in ways you use nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs?
- If you fluently speak a language other than English, make a list of all the different ways in which you use this language, too

### The written reflection:

- Prepare a 2-3-page double-spaced Personal Language(s) Inventory Reflection in which you reflect on and analyze your language use. Feel free to use any guiding questions above to shape your writing.

- Your writing will draw mostly from your own experiences.
- However, make references to the Amy Tan essay at least once and comment on how it relates to and informs your reflections and insights. When you make reference to the Tan essay, use a direct quote from her work, in order to make your reference more specific, and comment explicitly on how it relates to your reflections.
- Also, make reference to any one of the four supplementary scholarly readings listed on page 1, by linking a point from one of the essays to a pattern or theme about your language use(s)—including communicative repertoires, language ideologies, raciolinguistics, responsive scaffolding.

Personal Language Inventory (Athanases, Edu 150)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Enter "data" of your language use over the course of an actual week, or you may include examples from recent scenes that illustrate your communicative repertoire.

Context	Example	Analysis