

Over the Reading Break, keep a notebook with you as you move around the community. Record interesting usages of language and make notes about what those usages tell you about how language functions “in the wild.”

You may wish to divide your pages into three sections:

1. Observations: just note down what you hear or see;
2. Notes on Observations: What strikes you as significant about what you’ve heard or seen? What questions arise and what answers can you think of?
3. Reflection: How do your observations and notes illuminate the role of language in a social space?

Here are some ideas and questions to keep in your mind as you move through your language communities:

### 1. LANGUAGE VARIATION

Record examples of “non-standard” usage or language variation:

- Observe:
  - What aspects of the speech caught your attention?
  - What was your reaction upon hearing this usage? Did you feel at home? Did you find yourself making judgments about the speaker? Were these judgments positive or negative? Why?
- Notes:
  - What can you infer about the speech community represented by the usage?
  - What can you infer about your own speech community based on your initial response to the usage?
- Reflection:
  - What do this observed usage and your response to it tell you about how language variation operates in the social space?
  - What does it tell you about how language usage and variation relate to status, belonging or power?

### 2. SELF-REFLECTION and LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

Record your own use of language in diverse social contexts:

- Observation:
  - How do you speak in these situations: talking to your boss; talking to your friends; talking to parents; in public; on social media; talking to yourself?
  - What aspects of your speech caught your attention?
- Notes:
  - Do you occupy more than one speech community?
  - What features of language usage define your speech communities?
  - Do you code switch consciously?
  - What is the goal or pay-off for you when you switch?
- Reflection:
  - If you switch often or don’t switch your codes at all, what does that tell you about your linguistic status or social position in the world?

- What does your personal use of language tell you about how language is implicated in social interaction, status, belonging or power?

### 3. PRAGMATICS and SOCIAL CUES

Record your observations of conversations in different social contexts. For example: in a store (customer/clerk); between two strangers or between two friends; among a group of people (in a meeting, at a coffee shop etc.); between a boss and an employee; between people of different genders, races, economic backgrounds etc.

- Observation:
  - Who speaks first?
  - Who speaks longest?
  - Who is more likely to interrupt or to be interrupted?
  - How does a speaker “keep the floor?”
  - What gestures, postures or actions support the above? (Eg. A sharp intake of breath may signal a range of things including disapproval or a desire to speak)
- Notes:
  - What can you infer about the relative status of the speakers?
  - What can you infer about the nature of their relationship?
  - How are the tacit (unspoken) “rules” of social interaction enforced or broken and to what effect?
- Reflection:
  - What do these observations tell you about how pragmatics reflect and shape social relationships?
  - What do they tell you about how language is implicated in the production and reproduction of systems of status, belonging or power?