

Speaking is an action through which meaning is contextually created. Its complex functions are best studied ethnographically. An *ethnography of communication* (Hymes 1974) includes analysis of speech, situational contexts, and cultural norms used in evaluating talk. (Nancy Bonvillain, Language, Culture, and Communication, page 1)

As a JEP participant, your work in the community is similar to that of the linguist-ethnographer. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, thereby allowing you to study language, society and culture “in action.” These Reflective Questions are designed to help you reflect on your experiences from a linguistic perspective and prepare you for writing your JEP Paper.

Please read through this entire set of Reflective Journal Questions prior to beginning your JEP assignment. The questions are related to and build upon one other. We encourage you to refer back to your previous responses and to consider your P.A.’s feedback each week. Doing so will help you to develop your ideas and arguments over the course of the semester and to learn more from your experiences.

As you respond to the questions, you should **concentrate on answering the main question (the highlighted one)**. The subsequent prompts are focusing questions to help you identify critical factors related to the main question. Please feel free to go beyond the prompts and write whatever seems important to you about your experiences — especially when those experiences are related to the primary issue(s) raised in the main question. Please draw from all of your site experiences when answering each weekly question (e.g., when answering the Week 7 question, draw from your experiences Weeks 1-7). For all weeks except week eight, you may substitute one of the Alternate Questions on the last page when your JEP site does not allow you to adequately answer a Reflective Question.

Other tips that will help you compose thoughtful journal responses:

- When appropriate, take notes at your site, jotting down observations and recording conversations and quotes. As soon as possible after leaving your JEP site, write down as much as you can recall about your experiences.
- Avoid generalizations and psychological explanations of behavior. Instead, focus on writing detailed and concrete accounts of people, social settings, and conversations (including direct quotes, when possible).

Please refer to the PA agreement you received in training for instructions regarding journal due dates and format requirements.

Finally, your experiences in the community will provide you with a valuable opportunity to apply the theories you are learning about in class. **Please be respectful of the community and the limits of your experience and knowledge.** Try to balance your enthusiasm for testing out theories with your responsibilities as a mentor and tutor for children.

Week One -- First Impressions

Describe your initial experience at your JEP assignment, including a detailed description of your responsibilities and activities involved in your particular assignment. What are your most vivid first impressions of the site? What were some of your expectations prior to beginning your assignment? How did your experiences this week compare to your expectations. Do you have any ideas about how your responsibilities and activities might inform your linguistics coursework?

Week Two --The Social and Physical Context

Describe the sociolinguistic context of your JEP site. Try to be as specific as possible about the size of the group (i.e., number of people) as well as the age, sex, race, ethnicity, languages and/or varieties of English spoken, and any other significant characteristics of all those involved in your assignment. Describe the physical layout of your site, providing detail about the size, space, décor, noise level, etc., of the classroom (or meeting room), building(s), and grounds. How does the site compare with the sociolinguistic context of the USC campus project?

Week Three – Slang

At the beginning of the semester, you learned about slang terms. **Reflect upon the ways in which students or other people at your site use slang terms.** How innovative are these slang terms? Have you heard them before? If so, in what context(s)? If not, did these terms or phrases initially cause confusion when you first heard them spoken? Are the slang terms grounded in a specific culture (such as a specific foreign language)? Consider comparing and contrasting your experiences at your JEP site with the slang dictionary of USC.

Week Four -- Sociolinguistic Status in the Classroom

How are status divisions in the classroom marked through language? Can you identify distinct practices that vary by age, social class, and institutional position? Look for differences in language, as well as variations in spatial arrangements, clothing, popular imagery, and other details of social organization. Describe how questions are used to establish authority in the classroom. Provide specific examples from your site. (Note: If you are not working in a school, adapt this question for other institutional settings.)

Week Five -- Contextual Components of Communication

Building on your observations from week four, pay attention to the language that students use in different contexts. Do children use more formal language with teachers and other authority figures? Do they switch to a more informal vernacular when speaking with peers? How do the children interact with you (and vice versa)? Has this pattern changed at all over the last five weeks? Provide examples from your site, noting differences in the languages spoken (e.g., English vs. Spanish), topics of conversation, vocabulary, tone, loquaciousness, terms of address, etc.

Week Six -- Bilingual Education

If you have worked with Spanish-speaking children (or children whose language is something other than English), how have these experiences influenced your perspectives on bilingual education and the English-only movement? Whenever possible, refer to the articles you read on the English-only movement during week 11 of the semester.

Week Seven -- Language and Gender

In chapter one of You Just Don't Understand, Deborah Tannen makes the following observation: "If women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence, then communication between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles. Instead of different dialects, it has been said they speak different genderlects" (42). Reflect upon the conversations between boys/men and girls/women at your site. **According to your observations, do girls/women or boys/men at your site follow the conversation patterns as outlined in the first five chapters of Deborah Tannen's You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation?**

Hint: In order to focus your answer to this question, you will not be able to reflect upon all of the ideas Tannen presents in chapters 1-5. Rather, just chose one or two of her points to reflect upon, and be as specific as possible with your examples.

Week Eight – Final Reflections (Note: You may not substitute an “Alternate Question” this week). According to USC’s mission statement, “The central mission of the University of Southern California is the development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit. The principal means by which our mission is accomplished are teaching, research, artistic creation, professional practice and selected forms of public service” (http://www.usc.edu/private/factbook/USCRole_and_Mission_Statement_1993.pdf).

Consider this statement in light of your experiences in JEP. Do you think public service — and specifically your service-learning experiences in the community via JEP — have helped to “cultivate” or “enrich” your “mind” and “spirit” and/or those of the community members with whom you worked? If so, how? If not, why not? Please describe in detail what you have gained from your experiences through JEP from an intellectual, spiritual and/or ethical perspective. How have your experiences in JEP compared to what you expected to get out of the experience?

ALTERNATE QUESTIONS

Option One -- Cross-Cultural Miscommunication

Have you observed any situations in which there was miscommunication between speakers of different languages or ethnic groups? Give two examples: one from your JEP experience and one from another setting. Describe the nature and the settings of these miscommunications and how they got resolved (or not). How are the resolutions similar and/or different within each setting?

Option Two -- Learning Language

Pay attention to the grammatical and syntax errors made by the student with whom you are working. Are there any patterns to these errors? For example, does the child leave out particular grammatical morphemes such as the plural or past tense? Are there any errors in sentence structure, such as failure to use correct “helping verbs” (e.g., is, have, etc.) or incorrect use of prepositions (e.g., saying “to” where the word should be “from”)? Can you identify other types of language errors? How are these errors consistent with the process of language acquisition? Might the errors be characteristic of someone whose native language is not English?

Option Three – Multilingual Communities

What languages (e.g., English, Spanish, etc.) are used in the classroom or other parts of school? Who speaks these languages? When are they spoken (e.g., in certain social situations, during official classroom activities, when students interact with the teacher, when students play with peers)? Do the students appear more comfortable/competent when speaking one language instead of another one? Consider how your cultural background might influence or play a role in your communication with the students at your JEP site. For example, if you are working as a mentor with a non-native English speaker, do you think that having an understanding of his or her language or culture might help in fostering a stronger mentor-mentee relationship?