

Writing Assignment Prompt

Language & and the Representation of Muslims

Suggested length: 4-6 pages (not including works cited page or appendix. You may include transcripts in the appendix.)

Reference Material: *The Craft of Research* chapters 7, 8, and 9

Assignment Details:

Description: This writing assignment will allow you to practice analysis skills to create an argument and explore the architecture of writing arguments. Building off the class discussion on the representation of Muslims, you will analyze media and linguistic data to make your own arguments about how language shapes, manipulates, and influences social identities.

Assignment Purpose: The purposes of the assignment are to (1) learn how to analyze linguistic data; (2) practice constructing arguments by making claims and supporting them with evidence and reasons; (3) contextualize linguistic data in the social context; and (4) become more critical thinkers and writers.

Audience: As all the issues below are contemporary issues, not much analysis through the lens of linguistic anthropology has been done. Your writing would be a contribution both to scholarly analysis but also to reflections on problematic and under-observed issues around the reproduction of social inequity and injustice. Imagine your audience to be smart, critical people, interested in contemporary challenges but not well versed in linguistic anthropology.

Revising - Small Group Workshops: For this paper, you will receive feedback on your first draft from a small group of your peers. Groups will be determined in advance and you will post to the forum section of the course website.

Linguistic Data:

You can either choose from the following list or select your own (if you choose something not on this list, please discuss the source with me before proceeding):

- Political Speeches
 - President Trump’s (May 2017) Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit
 - President Obama’s (December 2015) Address to the Nation on the San Bernardino shooting
- Other Media
 - *Halal in the Family* (2015) – a sitcom parody TV show about a Muslim family.
 - *Master of None* (2017) Season 2, episode 3 “Religion” – comedy show featuring Aziz Ansari (this source requires a Netflix account)
 - *By the Dawn’s Early Light: Chris Jackson’s Journey to Islam* (2005) – documentary about the basketball player Chris Jackson/Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf who converted to Islam and refused to stand for the anthem.
 - *All-American Muslim* (2011-2012) – reality show about Muslims in America.
 - *Arranged* (2007)– a film about a friendship between two teachers, who are both going through the marriage process. One teacher is an Orthodox Jew and the other Muslim.

Research Question:

Analyze one of the media/political documents above and write a paper asking and answering a

question about the representation of Muslims. You will need to design the specific question as you analyze and write.

Building your assignment:

Week 1 – Steps 1-5

Step 1: Transcription

Like we have done in class, start your linguistic analysis with a transcript. After you have viewed your data, transcribe the most relevant scenes/episodes or the places where you want to start/focus your analysis.

Step 2: Preliminary Analysis

Begin marking up your transcript with things that catch your attention, intrigue you, surprise you, or seem worth noting. You can create your own coding system; just remember to design a key for all the codes. Watch and re-watch the clip, each time adding codes/notes of things you notice. Some things to pay attention to may include: intonation, pauses, gestures, eye gaze, how objects are being used or not used, who speaks first, who speaks the most/least, how are people positioning themselves and others, who is aligning with whom, etc. I find this works best/easiest on a printed version with multiple colors to help you see layers of analysis.

Some ideas/question to keep in mind to guide you:

- How is “Islam” or “Muslim” used? What/who do those categories refer to and what do they mean? What are the implications of such labels?
- Who is automatically assumed to be Muslim and what associations does it come with?
Which Muslims can “pass” and what does that allow?
- To what extent do the categories of Muslim and American overlap and under what situations? When do they NOT overlap?

- Which negative actions/activities are projected onto which social identities and how? What positive actions/activities are projected onto which social identities and how?
- How are pronouns being used (“us” vs “them”; who is included in “we”)?
- How does the representation of Muslims in the data meet the broader context of Muslims in America? How does that social context impact your data?

Step 3: Develop a research question

Now that you have some preliminary analysis, draft a research question that you want to explore in the paper. Identifying something that surprises you is an effective way to start. What about the issue of representation do you want to explore? We will workshop research questions in class so that you get some support and feedback on this part.

Step 4: Building a thesis

Once you have a draft research question, continue your analysis in ways that will help you answer that question. This should lead you to a draft thesis. It is okay for your research question and thesis to change as you work. Refer back to the suggestions under step 2 to continue your analysis.

Step 5: Outline your argument

Outline your argument with the subclaims and evidence to support it.

Week 2 – Steps 6- 7

Step 6: Draft 1

Write the first draft of your paper.

Step 7: Peer review

[This file is supplemental material to Welji, *Interrogating the “Good” Muslim: Challenging Representations of Muslims through Linguistic Analysis*, prompt 6.1 (2021), doi: 10.31719/pjaw.v6i1.82]

In addition to whatever editing and revision processes that you find helpful, submit your draft to your small group for peer review. Read and comment on each of the drafts prior to the workshop so you are prepared to share your thoughts and suggestions during class.

Week 3 – Step 8

Step 8: Final revisions

Complete any final revisions and submit your final draft on the course website.

Structure of the argument:

Begin with an introduction that introduces your data, sets up the context of looking at Muslims in America, proposes a question, mentions the significance of the question and ends with your thesis (your answer to the question).

The body of your paper lays out claims that elaborate on your thesis and are supported by reason and evidence. You will need to reference parts of the text from your data explicitly to support your arguments. You can do so by integrating excerpts of your transcripts (interactions), quoted lines or image stills from your data, just as the authors we read cite linguistic or visual evidence in their papers. Your analysis, coding schemes, theories, patterns you notice, analysis of word choice will also help you connect the evidence from the data to the thesis you are arguing. This may become the “reason” that supports some of your claims.

Your conclusion only needs a few sentences of summary. Use your conclusion to go further into why your argument is significant. Why is your argument important and worth knowing?

Citing sources: You may cite outside sources in your paper. Some of these sources may be course material to contextualize Muslims in America, or theoretical lenses by which to look at the data. They may also be outside sources to further the context in which you are examining your data. Include a Works Cited page for anything you cite.

Grading:

Assignments are evaluated with a letter grade based on how successfully the paper analyzes the data, builds an argument, and reflects critical thinking and writing.

A successful essay will:

- Take a focused, arguable position articulated in a clear, identifiable, and significant thesis.
- Be clear and conceptually organized, which means that rather than listing points as you move from paragraph to paragraph, each paragraph should logically build off the previous paragraph and help to explain to the reader your thesis.
- Offer supporting evidence for all the claims you make, drawn from your linguistic data and your observations as well as your analysis of the material that explains how your observations are working to support your argument.
- Incorporate course theories and ideas to support your interpretation of political language and concepts of inclusion and exclusion.
- Situate your analysis in the context of the representation of Muslims.