

Language social  
standing of a person.  
therefore, for



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Language is a complex phenomenon which can be viewed from different perspectives. On the one hand, the simplest view of language is that it is a means of communication and rendering essential information. On the other hand, not only language itself but the way it is used can bear significant meaning as well. Mastering a language in written and spoken word testifies to a certain social standing of a person.

Therefore, for some people language is a privilege that allows them to rise not only above animals but also above other people whose command of language is lower. On a certain level, knowledge can become painful to its bearer, depending on the kind of information acquired. Frederick Douglass' experience shows that the skills of reading and writing do not always bring peace to mind. Once Douglass could read, he learned about the flagrant injustice towards the black population. This knowledge tormented him and he " would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing" (Douglass 97). However, the desire to escape from the " mental darkness" he was doomed to by his white owners still prevailed in Douglass' heart (Douglass 95). Mastering the language in reading and writing helped him to realize the true state of things. For Douglass, literacy started to associate with the notion of freedom, since through learning to read and write he grasped the basic ideas on human rights infringement and the necessity for abolition of slavery.

Language as a privilege of the educated upper-class serves as a token of social success and recognition. For Amy Tan, there exist several " Englishes" which differ depending on the situation of speaking and on the people who take part in the conversation (Tan 249). On the one hand, there is her

mother's "broken" English, a random compilation of words not linked with each other grammatically and barely making sense to an unprepared listener (Tan 250). On the other hand, there is the grammatically and lexically perfect English Tan speaks to native speakers. The contrast between the two languages is obvious not only in the outward sentence structure. It can be observed in the way those two variations of language are perceived by other people. In a conflict situation with the hospital staff, it appears that speaking "broken" English downgrades a person to a level of a statistical unit.

And only showing one's education and social standings through perfect English earns respect and access to the appropriate social benefits. Certain words have great power and meaning in a language. The intricate ways language works is shown by Andrew Sullivan, who demonstrates the forbidden nature of the word 'marriage' for same-sex couples.

By not stating this word directly in the title of his short story and by substituting it with a provocative shortening "M-word", Sullivan emphasizes the existence of taboos on official relations between same-sex individuals (Sullivan 246). The tragedy of his story is that a word fully accepted in traditional society becomes taboo for him and thus, in a linguistic way, makes him an outcast among the others. Language is a powerful instrument of social influence. On the one hand, illiteracy is a way of screening people off a large corps of socially significant knowledge. On the other hand, mastering language on a high level opens access to the standard social benefits and general respect. Language is an efficient method of social ostracism, since socially unacceptable phenomena are labeled with unacceptable words. Therefore, language is not just a set of words and rules:

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it bears much more information ‘ between the lines’ that may crucially define one’s social success or failure.

## **Works Cited**

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