

## Exploring Language: Bridges of Empathy and Human Unity

"What is language?", the teacher's inquiry resonated within the classroom, triggering debate over linguistic wonder. Can language, confined by grammar and sentences, entirely encompass the true intention of human expression? Following the debate, I came across a quote from novelist Franz Kafka: "Language is but a poor translation." It would bring on a journey that would show me light at the end of a dark tunnel. Turning the path that jailed me in the bars of languages, into an exploration of the beauty in human interaction.

I'm Japanese. My entire family is Japanese and I was born in Japan. However, due to my father's job, migration between Japan and England forced me into the challenging landscapes of linguistic fluency. Desperately grasping at both tongues stretched me from ever being proficient in either. Expressing my thoughts in Japanese or English remains a puzzle to be solved with missing pieces. Compared to my peers who've mastered the puzzle of their respective languages, I felt lost in the mastery of communication.

Kafka's quote seems to explain my frustrations. It signifies that language falls short of translating complex sentiment into communication. It is the discrepancy between

internal thought and verbal expression. Growing up, my conversations felt like horrid translations of movies, sacrificing nuances of the film's original intent for a butchered copy of the original art, never to be understood by another.

I began attending an international boarding school in Nagano last year. Initially, our diverse community sparked a profound sense of elation within me. Engaging in endless discussions of foreign perspectives and experiencing new cultures was nothing short of enchanting.

However, I soon felt uncomfortable as even the most innocuous words were often misconstrued as "discriminatory" behavior, plaguing daily discussion. My feeling of enchantment was corrupted by the disheartening reality that anyone could be accused of discrimination despite no intention to hurt others. Fear fostered a sense of apprehension shrouding my words, as a perceptible divide emerged between myself and classmates of varying cultural backgrounds. The beauty of diverse interactions was left behind as I exclusively engaged with like-minded Japanese students.

In the depth of my reclusion, an unexpected but freeing encounter occurred during an Ainu visit exploring indigenous culture with my school. Amidst the vibrant tapestries and rhythmic dances that were taught, it was the Q&A session that forever changed me, as an Ainu speaker's message for the world was made clear.

They emphasized transcending historical conflicts to nurture international unity, asserting "Ainu" means "human" in the Ainu language, devoid of racial, gender, or religious distinctions. They highlighted the need for empathy that surpasses the use of language, utilizing emotion as a power of communication. Our strength of our unity through empathy outweighs the dichotomy of division.

Psychologically, the unknown tends to evoke fear within us. With globalization ever advancing, humanity often fixates on our disparities, costing us mutual understanding and empathy. We must recognize and cherish our shared traits, to find our commonalities, to forge connections capable of conveying nuances beyond the scope of mere language. Afterall, the Ekman theory states there is universality in how emotions are expressed globally, with potential to surpass the barriers of language.

Misunderstandings are intrinsic to human interaction, transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries, regardless of how diverse. Language is indeed a broken medium of partial translation, a mangled transmission of inner thoughts. Yet, the Ainu revelation beckoned a triumph of solidarity via empathy through commonality. I strongly believe that as long as we cherish our commonalities and foster empathy that heals the root of our misunderstandings birthed of linguistic and cultural conflict. Turning our individual fortresses of fear into a jointly built kaleidoscope of unique perspectives.

Thus, sprouting from the healthy soil of empathy, I aspire to spend my life exploring the myriad of viewpoints that diverge from our commonalities. To work towards the reward of gazing upon the vibrant lens of humanity's kaleidoscope for myself and all around me.

The question "What is language?" led me to appreciate the human unity that connects despite its imperfections. Language, while imperfect, is an essential bridge; a bridge to teach empathy stands as our ultimate objective to strive for a brighter, more strongly connected future. [698 words]