

Examine the importance of language as a cultural indicator.

(80 marks)

Marking Scheme:

Number of aspects discussed:	3 @ 20 marks each	4 @ 15 marks each
<u>For each aspect:</u>		
Identifying aspect	4 marks	3 marks
Discussion	8 x SRPs	6 x SRPs

Overall Coherence 20 marks graded* 20 marks graded*

In this answer, I choose 3 aspects to discuss (1. Polish, 2. French and, 3. Basque Language as cultural indicators). Overall coherence means how well your answer is structured (Introduction, main section, conclusion – well-structured and coherent) and do you keep to the point/ answer the question directly.

Language plays an important role in defining a person's sense of identity and, therefore, a shared language is an important aspect of cultural identity. This aspect of language creating a shared identity and acting as a cultural indicator can be seen in the three countries I shall discuss – Poland, France and the Basque region of Spain. In each of these, language acted as a unifying force for her people.

The first aspect I shall discuss is how the Polish language acted as a unifying cultural indicator throughout her countries turbulent history. With an estimated 43 million people around the world speaking the Polish language, Polish serves as the official language of Poland, where it exists as the mother tongue of an estimated 38 million people. Polish is a unique cultural indicator in that it is estimated to have around 200,000 words, dating back to its Slavic origins. This is compared to English with an estimated 170,000 words. With Poland becoming a unified state in the 10th Century, Polish was used to create a sense of community and cultural tradition which they have looked to maintain. This new state, using language as one of its cultural identifiers, was also heavily influenced by its Roman Catholic faith so that Latin was used in the creation of its alphabet. This created a very unique language where, for example, diagraphs were used, where a pair of characters are used to write a single sound to convey sounds that cannot be represented by a strictly Latin-based alphabet (eg. "sz," which sounds much like English language's "sh" sound). The Polish language flourished with, for example, the first Polish language book printed in Wroclaw in 1495. While there were many occupations throughout her history (Austrian empire, Germany and USSR), the Polish language was used as a unifying force and cultural indicator amongst her people. With the conclusion of World War II, Poland was split into two zones followed by the formation of the Polish Peoples Republic in 1952 to 1990 controlled by the USSR as a communist state. During this time, as the USSR communist empire believed, religion and the Polish language were outlawed and was not allowed in the schools, courts or government. Despite this the Polish people clung on to their language and it became a symbol of cultural resistance to foreign rule. Poems, songs, story and folklore were kept alive by the people all over the country as an act of defiance and a sense of national identity and pride. In 2004 Poland joined the European Union and Polish became an officially

recognized language. Polish culture has produced an impressive number of renowned artists, thinkers, and writers. Approximately 20 Nobel Prize winners, from poets to scientists, are of Polish origin. Also, there are 122,500 Polish migrants (largest migrant group) now living in Ireland (2016) bringing a rich and diverse cultural heritage to our country.

My second topic for discussion is how French was used by her government to unite a divided community under the one cultural indicator of language. In 1789 at the time of the French Revolution only 3 million of the 25 million population spoke Parisian French. Prior to the French Revolution of 1789, French kings did not take a strong position on the language spoken by their subjects. However, in sweeping away the old provinces, parliaments and laws, the Revolution strengthened the unified system of administration across the state. The Revolutionaries made the French language the symbol of national unity and laws were passed that French would be the only language tolerated in public life and in schools in France. It would therefore act as the cultural indicator of the French nation. Today French is the first language of 88% of the population. The Purity of the language is protected by the Académie Française, where its 40 members decide which new words will be included in the Language. Laws also have been passed to protect the language; the Toubon law 1994 makes the use of French mandatory in all spheres of Public life. The use of French is required by law in commercial and workplace communications. The government is also actively discouraging the borrowing of words from the English language (anglicisation) but this is having mixed success. This mixture of French and English known as Franglais is becoming stronger with the influence of American media, sitcoms and the internet. Younger generations of French society are also being exposed to American slang via the North African districts in French cities where rap and hip hop are the music of choice and fashion is heavily influenced from the Bronx etc. France presents itself as a big country struggling for cultural individuality against the predominance of English in international affairs. Also regional languages have declined over the past 200 years but dialects of Bretons, Catalan, Basque, Flemish etc. are still in use. Despite popular demand for official recognition, due to her constitution, regional language teaching is not supported by the state. However, in certain areas, such as Brittany, regional councils maintain bilingual public schools as far as it is allowed within the law.

Finally, language as a cultural indicator underpins the Basque cultural group that live in the Pyrenees Mountains that border between France and Spain. There are over 2 million people living in the Basque country. Their language is known as Euskara. Linguistically, Basque is unrelated to the other languages of Europe and indeed, as a language, isolated from any other known living language. There are five historic Basque dialects in Spain, and two in France. In both Spain and France, the use of Basque for education varies from region to region and from school to school but separates them as a distinct cultural group within these borders. The majority of Basques live in Spain. The official languages of this region are Basque and Spanish. Knowledge of Spanish is compulsory under the Spanish constitution (article no. 3), and knowledge and usage of Basque is a right under the Statute of Autonomy (article no. 6) which also separates and provides them with their cultural distinctiveness. Knowledge of Basque, after declining for many years during Franco's dictatorship owing to official persecution, is again on the rise due to favourable official language policies and popular support. Currently about 33 percent of the population in the Basque Autonomous Community speaks Basque in everyday life. The most important cities in this region, which serve as the provinces' administrative centers, are Bilbao, San Sebastián, and Vitoria-

Gasteiz in Álava. Under Francoist Spain, public use of Basque was frowned upon, often regarded as a sign of separatism. However, in those Basque-speaking regions that supported the uprising the Basque language was more than merely tolerated. Overall, in the 1960s and later, the trend reversed and education and publishing in Basque began to flourish. As a part of this process, a standardised form of the Basque language, called Euskara Batua, was developed in the late 1960s. In 1975 after Franco's death the region was granted some political Autonomy but it was far from close to independence. A quarter of a million people live in the French Basque Country. Nowadays Basque-speakers refer to this region as the Basque for North. The Basque language, which was traditionally spoken by most of the region's population outside the BAB urban zone, is today rapidly losing ground to French.

Therefore the three languages of Polish, French and Basque can be seen as clear cultural indicators which unified a population under the one language.

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