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| *English L&L HL* |
| Written Task #1 on Language and Power |
| Being a Roma in Bulgaria – Diary of Zlatka Asenova |
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| *2/8/2017* |

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*Rationale:*  
 The topic we most recently examined in our English Class is Language and Power, or more specific, how can language be used to demonstrate or exert issues of power. This Written Task is going to focus on a particular issue related to the use of language as a way to negotiate some type of power. That is the issue of how the word “gypsy” has been used to refer to Romani people, and the different connotations it suggests. I chose to approach the task by doing a diary that comprises of two entries, reflecting the emotions and thoughts of a fictional character who has been directly affected by the misuse of the word.   
 In order to better understand the stance of the character, I would like to give some background information on her origin. Zlatka Asenova is a young Roma, who has migrated to Bulgaria and made the country her home. She works as a street sweeper and is satisfied with her job and her salary. Still, Zlatka feels like she is never going to be fully integrated in Bulgarian society, since most citizens are referring to her and the rest of the people from her ethnic group as “gypsies”, rather than recognizing them as an ethnicity and calling them by their actual name. In her diary, Zlatka is going to express her personal emotions about how the word “gypsy” is used as reference, the situations in which it is used, and the implications behind it. I believe a diary is a suitable text type to use in this case, because it allows the exploration of the power a word has over a specific individual, be it real or fictional.   
  
Word Count: 280

*Diary Entry #1*  
21st of March, 2009  
  
 Dear diary,  
  
 I’ve been living in Bulgaria for 5 years now, and, to be honest, I have never felt like I fully belong. That is so because of the generally agreed upon belief that people with my ethnic background solely steal, lie, and cause trouble. However, this is a type of generalization that dehumanizes us and makes it harder for us to prove that we might as well be valuable members of the community. We are considered a minority group, but we are just as human as the rest of the Bulgarian society and the only thing we want is some recognition.  
 Today I stumbled upon something very upsetting which made me think about my ethnicity and how we, Romani people, are accepted and seen by society in general. I happened to watch a video of Bulgaria’s current prime minister, Boyko Borisov, giving a speech in front of the Bulgarian Federation in Chicago, referring to us as “gypsies” and then stigmatizing us as “bad human material”. I took that not only as a personal offense, but also as an offense towards my whole race, which by itself has its own traditions, customs, values, and beliefs. It made me think of how people use the word “gypsy” to refer to us as a group, and the truth is, the word has a very specific connotation associated with it. That is a strictly negative connotation that implies we are thieves and vagabonds, that we have no purpose and bring no benefits for society. The word also suggests that we are dangerous, have a criminal tendency, and should be avoided when it comes to social interaction. What people do not understand is that words have power. Words have *enough* power to change the way you view something or someone, to influence an opinion and hinder an interest. Thus, by calling any of us a “gypsy”, they are verbally abusing our identity, devaluing us as humans and indirectly placing us in the position of enemies: something we most certainly don’t want to be.  
 There is an even bigger issue attached to the use or in this case, misuse, of the word “gypsy” – it has turned into an extended metaphor. For example, a “gypsy house” would mean a dirty and unkempt house, while a “gypsy job” refers to a job that’s sloppily done. Another metaphor, which is more internationally spread is a “gypsy wedding”, standing for something that has been overly embellished to a point where it gets ugly. When all of those phrases and the general idea they convey are circulating amongst the society you’re living in, they immediately turn you into an outcast. The rest of the community has some power over you: the power to persecute you and regard you as someone that you’re not. Needless to say, a “gypsy” does not even refer to any of the qualities Romani people actually have. It does not reflect our willingness to work and be a valuable part of any society through labor and participation in social deeds. It represents us in a strictly negative light, putting us in a lower stance than the rest of society. At some point, it’s us against all the others, and it is extremely bothersome to see how a word can create such a division between people.  
  
 *Diary Entry #2*  
25th of July, 2009   
  
 Dear diary,

As a Roma living in a country like Bulgaria, I often encounter people looking at me with a slight disgust in their eyes, or people throwing hostile comments at me. Still, it’s most disturbing when children adopt that discriminatory attitude from their parents. I was peacefully doing my job today, when a small, innocent-looking girl walked by, holding her mother’s hand tightly, squeezing it even more tightly as they approached me. When they were close enough for me to hear what they were saying, the girl mouthed, “Mom, look at that gypsy.” I felt horrified, humiliated, but most of all, I felt bitter that such strong words are coming from the mouth of such a young and oblivious girl. It made me come to the conclusion that many people who use the word “gypsy”, do not even know what it means and how it is different from Romani. They do not know that Romani is an ethnicity, while “gypsy” is a stigma. They use it because they have heard someone else using it, but they do not realize the extent to which the word is offensive.   
 After today’s event, I watched the speech I once wrote about a second time, and this time it evoked some even stronger feelings in me, so I felt obligated to further reflect on that and express my emotions. In particular, I want to elaborate on how the word “gypsy” has been used by different people from different social classes and backgrounds. I find the minister’s comment a complete abuse of power and a misuse of the word in general. Boyko Borisov is a very influential person in Bulgaria, therefore, when he speaks, people listen, even if his words are not necessarily relevant or credible. A person with his position and authority can’t allow himself to publicly stigmatize an ethnic group and use language to promote mass racial discrimination. One might argue that “gypsy” is just a word to more informally refer to Roma people. However, the way it’s used ascribes the word a meaning that falsely categorizes an ethnic group and builds them a reputation that diverts from the truth. Being seen as “gypsies” rather than Romas, interferes with our employment, with the rights we are given, and with the overall way we are accepted and integrated in any society.   
 That’s why, I would like to finish this entry off by saying that I will always be a Roma, but I will never see myself as an embodiment of the word “gypsy” and tolerate being called this way. I would like to encourage people to really think twice before calling people from my ethnicity something with such a negative and faulty implication, since no one would like to be associated with a persona that they do not correspond to.

Word Count: 1016 (to be reduced)