

Hello! My name is Rebecca LeVeque.. First of all, I would like to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to give this speech today. I would personally like to thank all of the instructors I've had in the Japanese program, as well as all of the faculty and staff in the department, and my family and my friends, as I would not be here without all of you. And I would like to thank everyone here for gathering to celebrate us graduating!

And to my fellow graduates - we finally made it! I don't know about you guys, but when this is all over I'm probably going to take at least a week-long nap. If not longer.

Today, I think I would like to talk about language - something that unites us all. When I told my mom that I was going to give this speech, she asked me if I'd be giving the speech in Japanese, and to that I have to say, お母さん、ごめんなさい！ Sorry, mom! In our department we are united by a love for language - a variety of languages - and I'm giving this speech in English, a language we are united by, rather than Japanese, a language that only some of us can understand.

While the purpose of language is to facilitate communication and be a means of expression, and an attempt to turn our thoughts into language is an attempt to translate our hearts into something that can be perceived and understood by others, language is something that is also highly individualized. We all have our own lexicons, our own idiolects. Our use of language is a highly personalized reflection of the people we have met in our lives and of the parts of our journey in life that we have been on so far.

When someone tells you that they're majoring in a language, your first thought may be that they must spend their days desperately sifting through their vocabulary flash cards in order to pass their language quizzes. While that is true to an extent, not everyone has had the same experience with their foreign language education. Our experiences with learning languages are highly individualized as well. Some people may have had no knowledge of the language they're studying before entering college. Others may have grown up in a multilingual household, or were inspired by family members to continue their language studies. Still, there are others who began their language studies before college.

It is impossible for me to represent the diverse experiences we have had in this department, but to use my experience as an example... While I am a Japanese major, when I entered UW as a freshman in 2018, I already had the language skills to take 400-level courses in Japanese thanks to high school classes and self-study. "Now, Rebecca, why would you major in Japanese when you already had a good grasp on the language?" Good question. First of all, no matter how long I've studied Japanese, I feel as though I'll never have as good of a grasp on it as I'd like to.

I also entered UW with the vague dream of becoming a translator - vague in that there are many types of translation work out there, and I wasn't exactly sure what kind of things I wanted to translate. I decided to major in Japanese hoping that I'd gain at least some clarity about what kind of translation I wanted to do. And I did! After nurturing a love for reading Japanese literature that was fueled both by the many literature classes I've taken and the Tateuchi East Asia Library's vast collection of novels in Japanese, I soon found that literary translation is the path I want to take. I've had the opportunity to read many works in Japanese literature in my time here through a variety of interesting classes about both classical and modern Japanese literature. Through the thesis I wrote for Departmental Honors about representation of queer women in one of my favorite works of Japanese literature, I've had the opportunity to think and write about works in Japanese literature depicting

queer women, and I would especially like to focus my future research and translation work on such works. Being a lesbian in the United States (especially in Seattle) is very different from being a lesbian in Japan, but through the language used in these works of literature, I feel as though mutual understanding and connection becomes possible.

Speaking of connection, seeing as this is the first in-person convocation our department has had since 2019 (when many of us were freshmen), it would probably be irresponsible to not mention the huge impact the pandemic has had and continues to have on our experience here at UW. I know it has had such a deep impact on our personal lives, and as for our education, we spent over a year separated from each other in online classes. In such a learning environment, making connections becomes even more difficult than it normally would be.

However, this is where I believe the power of words comes in. Words allow us to touch each other in a way that is not physical, to bring us closer together even when there is physical distance. Likewise, words are able to take us places. I know that many of us had study abroad programs canceled during the past couple of years, or found ourselves unable to go home to families in other countries. Still, words allow us to connect with those who are far away from us, and through reading, we are able to find ourselves venturing to places we could not go otherwise.

I'm sure this power that language has to connect will continue to serve, especially now that we are graduating and going our separate ways. No matter which way life takes us, and no matter how far apart we are, I'm sure that words will always have the power to keep us connected!

Thank you so much!