English without any pidgin/creole stage. It is apparent that AAE is closer to Southern dialects of American English than to other dialects. It is possible that the African slaves learned the English of white Southerners as a second language. It is also possible that many of the distinguishing features of Southern dialects were acquired from AAE during the many decades in which a large number of Southern white children were raised by black women and played with black children.

Tok Pisin, originally a pidgin, was gradually creolized throughout the twentieth century. It evolved from Melanesian Pidgin English, once a widely spoken lingua franca of Papua New Guinea used by English-speaking traders and the native population. Because New Guinea is so linguistically diverse—more than eight hundred different languages were once spoken throughout the island—the pidgin came to be used as a lingua franca among the indigenous population as well.

Tok Pisin has its own writing system, its own literature, and its own newspapers and radio programs; it has even been used to address a United Nations meeting. Papers in (not *on*!) Tok Pisin have been presented at linguistics conferences in Papua New Guinea, and it is commonly used for debates in the parliament of the country. Today, Tok Pisin is one of the three recognized national languages of The Independent State of Papua New Guinea, alongside English and Kiri Motu, another creole.

Sign languages may also be pidgins. In Nicaragua in the 1980s, adult deaf people came together and constructed a crude system of "home" signs and gestures in order to communicate. It had the characteristics of a pidgin in that different people used it differently and the grammatical rules were few and varied. However, when young deaf children joined the community, an amazing event took place. The crude sign language of the adults was tremendously enhanced by the children learning it, so much so that it emerged as a rich and complex sign language called Idioma de Signos Nicaragüense (ISN), or Nicaraguan Sign Language. ISN provides an impressive demonstration of the development of a grammatically complex language from impoverished input and the power of human linguistic creativity.

The study of pidgins and creoles has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the nature of human language and the processes involved in language creation and language change, and of the sociohistorical conditions under which these instances of language contact occurred.

Bilingualism

He who has two languages has two souls.

ANONYMOUS

The term **bilingualism** refers to the ability to speak two (or more) languages, either by an individual speakers, **individual bilingualism**, or within a society, **societal bilingualism**. In chapter 7 we discussed how bilingual children may simultaneously acquire their two languages, and how second languages are

acquired by children and adults. There are various degrees of individual bilingualism. Some people have native-like control of two languages, whereas others make regular use of two languages with a high degree of proficiency but lack the linguistic competence of a native or near native speaker in one or the other language. Also, some bilinguals may have oral competence but not read or write one or more of their languages.

The situations under which people become bilingual may vary. Some people grow up in a household in which more than one language is spoken; others move to a new country where they acquire the local language, usually from people outside the home. Still others learn second languages in school. In communities with rich linguistic diversity, contact between speakers of different languages may also lead to bilingualism.

Bilingualism (or multilingualism) also refers to the situation in nations in which two (or more) languages are spoken and recognized as official or national languages. Societal bilingualism exists in many countries, including Canada, where English and French are both official languages, and Switzerland, where French, German, Italian, and Romansch all have official status.

Interestingly, research shows that there are fewer bilingual individuals in bilingual countries than in so-called "unilingual" countries. This makes sense when you consider that in unilingual countries such as the United States, Italy, and France, people who do not speak the dominant language must learn some amount of it to function. Also, the main concern of multilingual states has been the maintenance and use of two or more languages, rather than the promotion of individual bilingualism among its citizens.

The United States is broadly perceived as a monolingual English-speaking society even though there is no reference to a national language in the Constitution. However, there are numerous bilingual communities with long histories throughout the country. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about 18 percent of those age five and over, or 47 million people, speak a language other than English at home. Sixty percent of these, about 25 million people (8 percent of the U.S. population), profess to being bilingual in English and Spanish with varying degrees of English proficiency. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of Spanish speakers in the United States increased by about 60 percent, and the number of speakers other than Spanish by about 50 percent. It should be noted that not all Latinos are bilingual; as many as 20 percent may be monolingual English speakers. Recent studies also show that the shift to monolingual English is growing rapidly and that knowledge of Spanish is being lost faster in the twenty-first century than was seen with speakers of Dutch, Italian, German, and Polish in the first half of the twentieth century.

Codeswitching

Codeswitching is a speech style unique to bilinguals, in which fluent speakers switch languages between or within sentences, as illustrated by the following sentence:.

Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and termino en español.
Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and finish it in Spanish.

Codeswitching is a universal language-contact phenomenon that reflects the grammars of both languages working simultaneously. Bilingual Spanish-English speakers may switch between English and Spanish as in the above example, whereas Quebecois in Canada switch between French and English:

I mean, c'est un idiot, ce mec-là.
I mean he's an idiot, that guy.

The following examples are from German-English, Korean-English, and Mandarin-English bilinguals:

Johan hat mir gesagt that you were going to leave.
Johan told me you were going to leave.

Chigum ton-uls ops-nunde, I can't buy it.
As I don't have money now, I can't buy it.

Women zuotian qu kan de movie was really amazing.
The movie we went to see yesterday was really amazing.

Codeswitching occurs wherever groups of bilinguals speak the same two languages. Furthermore, codeswitching occurs in specific social situations, enriching the repertoire of the speakers.

A common misconception is that codeswitching is indicative of a language disability of some kind, for example, that bilinguals use codeswitching as a coping strategy for incomplete mastery of both languages, or that they are speaking "broken" English. These characterizations are completely inaccurate. Recent studies of the social and linguistic properties of codeswitching indicate that it is a marker of bilingual identity, and has its own internal grammatical structure. For example, bilinguals will commonly codeswitch between a subject and a verb as in:

Mis amigos finished first.   My friends finished first.

but would judge ungrammatical a switch between a subject pronoun and a verb as in:

*Ellos finished first.   They finished first.

Codeswitchers also follow the word order rules of the languages. For example, in a Spanish noun phrase, the adjective usually follows the noun, as opposed to the English NP in which it precedes, as shown by the following:

English: My mom fixes **green tamales**.   Adj N
Spanish: Mi mamá hace **tamales verdes**.   N Adj

A speaker might codeswitch as follows:

My mom fixes **tamales verdes**.
or   Mi mamá hace **green tamales**.

but would not accept or produce such utterances as

> *My mom fixes **verdes tamales**.
> or   *Mi mamá hace **tamales green**.

because the word order within the NPs violates the rules of the language.

Codeswitching is to be distinguished from (bilingual) **borrowing**, which occurs when a word or short expression from one language occurs embedded among the words of a second language and adapts to the regular phonology, morphology, and syntax of the second language. In codeswitching, in contrast, the two languages that are interwoven preserve their own phonological and other grammatical properties. Borrowing can be easily distinguished from codeswitching by the pronunciation of an element. Sentence (1) involves borrowing, and (2) codeswitching.

(**1**)   I love biscottis [bɪskaɾiz] with my coffee.
(**2**)   I love biscotti [bɪskoːti] with my coffee.

In sentence (1) *biscotti* takes on an (American) English pronunciation and plural *-s* morphology, while in (2) it preserves the Italian pronunciation and plural morpheme *-i* (plural for *biscotto* "cookie").

What needs to be emphasized is that people who codeswitch have knowledge not of one but of two (or more) languages, and that codeswitching, like linguistic knowledge in general, is highly structured and rule-governed.

Language and Education

> Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend; inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.
> **GROUCHO MARX** (1890–1977)

The study of language has important implications in various educational arenas. An understanding of the structure, acquisition, and use of language is essential to the teaching of foreign and second languages, as well as to reading instruction. It can also promote a fuller understanding of language variation and use in the classroom and inform the often heated debates surrounding issues such as how to teach reading to children, bilingual education, and Ebonics.

Second-Language Teaching Methods

Many approaches to second or foreign language teaching have been developed over the years. Though these methods can differ significantly from one another, many experts believe that there is no single best method for teaching a second language. All methods have something to offer, and virtually any method can succeed with a gifted teacher who is a native or near-native speaker, motivated

students, and appropriate teaching materials. All methods are most effective when they fit a given educational setting and when they are understood and embraced by the teacher.

Second-language teaching methods fall into two broad categories: the *synthetic approach* and the *analytic approach.* As the name implies, the synthetic approach stresses the teaching of the grammatical, lexical, phonological, and functional units of the language step by step. This is a bottom-up method. The task of the learner is to put together—or synthesize—the discrete elements that make up the language. The more traditional language teaching methods, which stress grammar instruction, fall into this category.

An extreme example of the synthetic approach is the **grammar translation** method favored up until the mid-1960s, in which students learned lists of vocabulary, verb paradigms, and grammatical rules. Learners translated passages from the target language into their native language. The teacher typically conducted class in the students' native language, focusing on the grammatical parsing of texts, and there was little or no contextualization of the language being taught. Reading passages were carefully constructed to contain only vocabulary and structures to which learners had already been exposed, and errors in translation were corrected on the spot. Learners were tested on their mastery of rules, verb paradigms, and vocabulary. The students did not use the target language very much except in reading translated passages aloud.

Analytic approaches are more top-down. The goal is not to explicitly teach the component parts or rules of the target language. Rather, the instructor selects topics, texts, or tasks that are relevant to the needs and interests of the learner, whose job then is to discover the constituent parts of the language. This approach assumes that adults can extract the rules of the language from unstructured input, more or less like a child does when acquiring his first language.

Currently, one of the most widely practiced analytic approaches is *content-based instruction*, in which the focus is on making the language meaningful and on getting the student to communicate in the target language. Learners are encouraged to discuss issues and express opinions on various topics of interest to them in the target language. Topics for discussion might include "Online Romance" or "Taking Responsibility for Our Environment." Grammar rules are taught on an as-needed basis, and fluency takes precedence over grammatical accuracy. Classroom texts (both written and aural) are generally taken from sources that were not created specifically for language learners, on the assumption that these will be more interesting and relevant to the student. Assessment is based on the learner's comprehension of the target language.

Not all second-language teaching methods fall clearly into one or the other category. The synthetic and analytic approaches should be viewed as the opposite ends of a continuum along which various second-language methods may fall. Also, teachers practicing a given method may not strictly follow all the principles of the method. Actual classroom practices tend to be more eclectic, with teachers using techniques that work well for them and to which they are accustomed—even if these techniques are not in complete accordance with the method they are practicing.

Teaching Reading
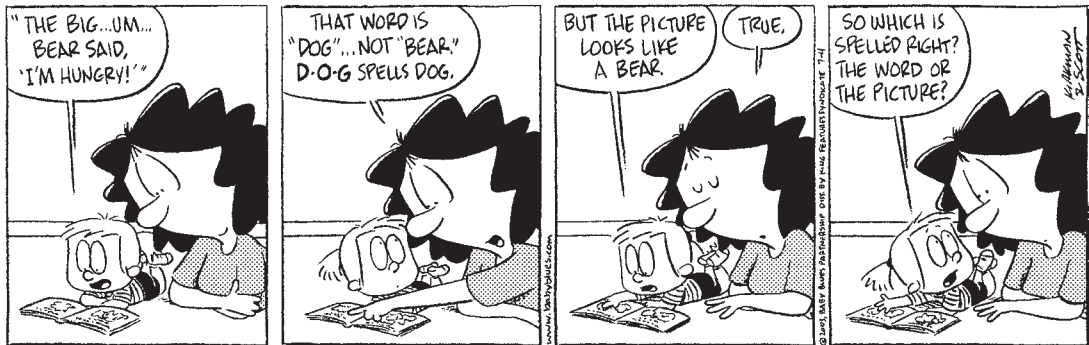
"Baby Blues" © Baby Blues Partnership. Reprinted with permission of King Features Syndicate.

In chapter 7 we discussed how young children acquire their native language. We noted that language development (whether of a spoken or sign language) is a biologically driven process with a substantial innate component. Parents do not teach their children the grammatical rules of their language. Indeed, they are not even aware of the rules themselves. Rather, the young child is naturally predisposed to uncover these rules from the language he hears around him. The way we learn to read and write, however, is quite different from the way we acquire the spoken/signed language.

First, and most obviously, children learn to talk (or sign) at a very young age, while reading typically begins when the child is school-age (around five or six years old in most cases, although some children are not reading-ready until even later). A second important difference is that across cultures and languages, all children acquire a spoken/signed language while many children never learn to read or write. This may be because they are born into cultures for which there is no written form of their language. It is also unfortunately the case that even some children born into literate societies do not learn to read, either because they suffer from a specific reading disability—**dyslexia**—or because they have not been properly taught. It is important to recognize, however, that even illiterate children and adults have a mental grammar of their language and are able to speak/sign and understand perfectly well.

The most important respect in which spoken/signed language development differs from learning to read is that reading requires specific instruction and conscious effort, whereas language acquisition does not. Which kind of instruction works best for teaching reading has been a topic of considerable debate for many decades. Three main approaches have been tried.

The first—the *whole-word approach*—teaches children to recognize a vocabulary of some fifty to one hundred words by rote learning, often by seeing the words used repeatedly in a story, for example, *Run, Spot, Run* from the Dick and Jane series well-known to people who learned to read in the 1950s. Other words are acquired gradually. This approach does not teach children to "sound out" words according to the individual sounds that make up the words. Rather,

it treats the written language as though it were a logographic system, such as Chinese, in which a single written character corresponds to a whole word or word root. In other words, the whole-word approach fails to take advantage of the fact that English (and the writing systems of most literate societies) is based on an alphabet, in which the symbols correspond to the individual sounds (roughly phonemes) of the language. This is ironic because alphabetic writing systems are the easiest to learn and are maximally efficient for transcribing any human language.

A second approach—*phonics*—emphasizes the correspondence between letters and the sounds associated with them. Phonics instruction begins by teaching children the letters of the alphabet and then encourages them to sound out words based on their knowledge of the sound-letter correspondences. So, if you have learned to read the word *gave* (understanding that the *e* is silent), then it is easy to read *save* and *pave.*

However, English and many other languages do not show a perfect correspondence between sounds and letters. For example, the rule for *gave*, *save*, and *pave* does not extend to *have.* The existence of many such exceptions has encouraged some schools to adopt a third approach to reading, the *whole-language approach* (also called "literature-based" or "guided reading"), which was most popular in the 1990s. The key principle is that phonics should not be taught directly. Rather, the child is supposed to make the connections between sounds and letters herself based on exposure to text. For example, she would be encouraged to figure out an unfamiliar word based on the context of the sentence or by looking for clues in the story line or the pictures rather than by sounding it out, as illustrated in the cartoon.

The philosophy behind the whole-language approach is that learning to read, like learning to speak, is a natural act that children can basically do on their own—an assumption that, as we noted earlier, is questionable at best. With the whole-language approach, the main job of the teacher is to make the reading experience an enjoyable one. To this end, children are presented with engaging books and are encouraged to write stories of their own as a way of instilling a love of reading and words.

Despite the intuitive appeal of the whole-language approach—after all, who would deny the educational value of good literature and creative expression in learning?—research has clearly shown that understanding the relationship between letters and sounds is critically important in reading. One of the assumptions of the whole-language approach is that skilled adult readers do not sound out words when reading, so proponents question the value of focusing on sounding out in reading instruction. However, research shows that the opposite is true: skilled adult readers *do* sound out words mentally, and they do so very rapidly. Another study compared groups of college students who were taught to read unfamiliar symbols such as Arabic letters, one group by a phonics approach and the other with a whole-word approach. Those trained with phonics could read many more new words. Similar results have been obtained through computer modeling of how children learn to read. Classroom studies have also compared phonics with whole-word or whole-language approaches and have shown that phonics instruction produces better results for beginning readers.

The advantage of phonics is not contradicted by studies showing that deaf children who have fully acquired a sign language have difficulty learning to read. This is understandable because the alphabetic principle requires an understanding of sound-symbol regularities, which deaf children do not have. It seems reasonable, then, that hearing children should not be deprived of the advantage they would have if their unconscious knowledge of phonemes is made conscious.

At this point, the consensus among psychologists and linguists who do research on reading—and a view shared by many teachers—is that reading instruction must be grounded in a firm understanding of the connections between letters and sounds, and that whole-language activities that make reading fun and meaningful for children should be used to supplement phonics instruction. Based on such research, the federal government now promotes the inclusion of phonics in reading programs across the United States.

Bilingual Education

As discussed earlier, there are many bilingual communities in the United States and members of these communities typically have varying levels of English proficiency. People who have recently arrived in the United States may have virtually no knowledge of English, other individuals may have only limited knowledge, and others may be fully bilingual. Native language development is untutored and happens before children begin school, but many children find themselves in classroom situations in which their native language is not the language of instruction. There has been a great deal of debate among researchers, teachers, parents, and the general public over the best methods for teaching English to school-age children as well as over the value of maintaining and promoting their native language abilities.

There are several kinds of bilingual programs in American schools for immigrant children. In **Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)** programs, students receive instruction in both English and their native language, and the native language support is gradually phased out over two or three years. In **Bilingual Maintenance** (BM) programs, students remain in bilingual classes for their entire educational experience. Another program, **Dual Language Immersion**, enrolls English-speaking children and students who are native in another language in roughly equal numbers. The goal here is for all the students to become bilingual. This kind of program serves as a BM program for non-English speakers and a foreign language immersion program for the English-speaking children.

Many studies have shown that immigrant children benefit from instruction in their native language. Bilingual classes allow the children to first acquire in their native language school-related vocabulary, speech styles, and other aspects of language that are specific to a school environment while they are learning English. It also allows them to learn content material and keep up with other children during the time it takes them to master English. Recent studies that compared the effectiveness of different types of programs have found that children enrolled in bilingual programs outperformed children in English-only programs, and that children enrolled in BM programs did better than TBE students.

Despite the benefits that a bilingual education affords immigrant students, these programs have been under increasing attack since the 1970s. In the past

few years measures against bilingual education have been passed in several states, including California, Arizona, and Massachusetts. These measures mandate that immigrant students "be taught English by being taught in English" in an English-only approach known as Sheltered English Immersion (SEI). Proponents claim that one year of SEI is sufficient for children, especially young children, to learn English well enough to be transferred to a mainstream classroom. Research does not bear out these claims, however. Studies show that only a small minority of children, around 3 percent to 4 percent of children in SEI programs and 13 percent to 14 percent in bilingual programs, acquire English within a year. A considerable body of research shows that for the vast majority of children it takes from two to five years to develop oral proficiency in English and four to seven years to develop proficiency in academic English.

There are several possible causes for the chasm between research results and public policy regarding bilingual education. Bilingual programs can be poorly implemented and so not achieve the desired results. There may also be a public perception that it is too costly to implement bilingual programs. It is likely that some of the backlash against bilingual education is due to anti-immigrant sentiment, but there are also many well-intentioned people who mistakenly believe that bilingualism is a handicap and that children will be more successful academically and socially if they are quickly and totally immersed in the more prestigious majority language.

"Ebonics"

Children who speak a dialect of English that differs from the language of instruction—usually close to Standard English—may also be disadvantaged in a school setting. Literacy instruction is generally based on SAE. It has been argued that the phonological and grammatical differences between African American English (AAE)—termed "Ebonics" in the popular press—and SAE make it harder for AAE-speaking children to learn to read and write.

One approach to this problem has been to discourage children from speaking AAE and to correct each departure from SAE that the children produce. SAE is presented as the "correct" way to speak and AAE as substandard or incorrect. This approach has been criticized as being psychologically damaging to the child as well as impractical. Attempts to consciously correct children's nonstandard dialect speech are routinely met with failure. Moreover, one's language/dialect expresses group identity and solidarity with friends and family. A child may take a rejection of his language as a rejection of him and his culture.

A more positive approach to teaching literacy to speakers of nonstandard dialects is to encourage **bidialectalism**. This approach teaches children to take pride in their language, encouraging them to use it in informal circumstances, with family and friends, while also teaching them a second dialect—SAE—that is necessary for reading, writing, and classroom discussion. As a point of comparison, in many countries, including Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, children grow up speaking a nonstandard dialect at home but learn the standard language once they enter school. This underscores that bidialectalism that combines a home dialect and a school/national language is entirely feasible. Educational programs that respect the home language may better facilitate the acquisition

of a standard dialect. Ideally, the bidialectal method would also include class discussion of the phonological and grammatical differences between the two dialects, which would require that teachers understand the linguistic properties of AAE, as well as some linguistics in general.

Language in Use

One of the themes of this book is that you have a lot of linguistic knowledge that you may not be aware of, but that can be made explicit through the rules of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. You also have a deep social knowledge of your language. You know the appropriate way to talk to your parents, your friends, your clergy, and your teachers. You know about "politically correct" (PC) language, to say "mail *carrier*," "fire*fighter*," and "police *officer*," and not to say "nigger," "wop," and "bitch." In short, you know how to *use* your language appropriately, even if you sometimes choose not to. This section discusses some of the many ways in which the use of language varies in society.

Styles

Most speakers of a language speak one way with friends, another on a job interview or presenting a report in class, another talking to small children, another with their parents, and so on. These "situation dialects" are called **styles,** or **registers**.

Nearly everybody has at least an informal and a formal style. In an informal style, the rules of contraction are used more often, the syntactic rules of negation and agreement may be altered, and many words are used that do not occur in the formal style.

Informal styles, although permitting certain abbreviations and deletions not permitted in formal speech, are also rule-governed. For example, questions are often shortened with the subject *you* and the auxiliary verb deleted. One can ask *Running the marathon?* or *You running the marathon?* instead of the more formal *Are you running the marathon?* but you cannot shorten the question to **Are running the marathon?* Informal talk is not anarchy. It is rule-governed, but the rules of deletion, contraction, and word choice are different from those of the formal language.

It is common for speakers to have competence in several styles, ranging between the two extremes of formal and informal. The use of styles is often a means of identification with a particular group (e.g., family, gang, church, team), or a means of excluding groups believed to be hostile or undesirable (cops, teachers, parents).

Many cultures have rules of social behavior that govern style. Some Indo-European languages distinguish between "you (familiar)" and "you (polite)." German *du* and French *tu* are to be used only with "intimates"; *Sie* and *vous* are more formal and used with nonintimates. Thai has three words meaning "eat" depending on the social status of who is speaking with whom.

Social situations affect the details of language usage, but the core grammar remains intact, with a few superficial variations that lend a particular flavor to the speech.

Slang

> Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands, and goes to work.

CARL SANDBURG, quoted in "Minstrel of America: Carl Sandburg," *New York Times*, February 13, 1959

One mark of an informal style is the frequent occurrence of **slang**. Slang is something that nearly everyone uses and recognizes, but nobody can define precisely. It is more metaphorical, playful, elliptical, vivid, and shorter-lived than ordinary language.

The use of slang has introduced many new words into the language by recombining old words into new meanings. *Spaced out*, *right on*, *hang-up*, and *rip-off* have all gained a degree of acceptance. Slang also introduces entirely new words such as *barf*, *flub*, and *dis*. Finally, slang often consists of ascribing entirely new meanings to old words. *Rave* has broadened its meaning to "an all-night dance party," where *ecstasy* (slang for a kind of drug) is taken to provoke wakefulness; *crib* refers to one's home and *posse* to one's cohorts. *Grass* and *pot* widened their meaning to "marijuana"; *pig* and *fuzz* are derogatory terms for "police officer"; *rap*, *cool*, *dig*, *stoned*, *bread*, *split*, and *suck* have all extended their semantic domains.

The words we have cited may sound slangy because they have not gained total acceptability. Words such as *dwindle*, *freshman*, *glib*, and *mob* are former slang words that in time overcame their "unsavory" origin. It is not always easy to know where to draw the line between slang words and regular words. The borderland between slang and formal language is ill-defined and is more of a continuum than a strict boundary.

There are scads (another slang word) of sources of slang. It comes from the underworld: *crack*, *payola*, *to hang paper*. It comes from college campuses: *crash*, *wicked*, *peace*. It even comes from the White House: *pencil* (writer), *still* (photographer), *football* (black box of security secrets).

Slang is universal. It is found in all languages and all time periods. It varies from region to region, and from past to present. Slang meets a variety of social needs and rather than a corruption of the language, it is yet further evidence of the creativity of the human language user.

Jargon and Argot

Practically every conceivable science, profession, trade, and occupation uses specific slang terms called **jargon**, or **argot**. Linguistic jargon, some of which is used in this book, consists of terms such as *phoneme*, *morpheme*, *case*, *lexicon*, *phrase structure rule*, and so on. Part of the reason for specialized terminology is for clarity of communication, but part is also for speakers to identify themselves with persons with whom they share interests.

Because the jargon used by different professional and social groups is so extensive (and so obscure in meaning), court reporters in the Los Angeles Criminal Courts Building have a library that includes books on medical terms, guns, trade names, and computer jargon, as well as street slang.

The computer age not only ushered in a technological revolution, it also introduced a slew of jargon, called, slangily, "computerese," used by computer "hackers" and others. So vast is this specialized vocabulary that *Webster's New World Computer Dictionary* has four hundred pages and contains thousands of computer terms as entries. A few such words that are familiar to most people are *modem* (from **modulator-dem**odulator), *bit* (from **binary digit**), and *byte* (eight *bits*). Acronyms and alphabetic abbreviations abound in computer jargon. *ROM* (read-only memory), *RAM* (random-access memory), *CPU* (central processing unit), and *DVD* (digital video disk) are a small fraction of what's out there.

Some jargon may over time pass into the standard language. Jargon, like all types of slang, spreads from a narrow group that originally embraced it until it is used and understood by a large segment of the population.

Taboo or Not Taboo?

Sex is a four-letter word.

BUMPER STICKER SLOGAN

"There are some words I will not tolerate in this house—and 'awesome' is one of them."

An item in a newspaper once included the following paragraph:

> "This is not a Sunday school, but it is a school of law," the judge said in warning the defendants he would not tolerate the "use of expletives during jury selection." "I'm not going to have my fellow citizens and prospective jurors subjected to filthy language," the judge added.

How can language be filthy? In fact, how can it be clean? The filth or beauty of language must be in the ear of the listener, or in the collective ear of society. The writer Paul Theroux points this out:

> A foreign swear-word is practically inoffensive except to the person who has learned it early in life and knows its social limits.

Nothing about a particular string of sounds makes it intrinsically clean or dirty, ugly or beautiful. If you say that you pricked your finger when sewing, no one would raise an eyebrow, but if you refer to your professor as a prick, the judge quoted previously would undoubtedly censure this "dirty" word.

You know the obscene words of your language, and you know the social situations in which they are desirable, acceptable, forbidden, and downright dangerous to utter. This is true of all speakers of all languages. All societies have their taboo words. (*Taboo* is a Tongan word meaning "forbidden.") People everywhere seem to have a need for undeleted expletives to express their emotions or attitudes.

Forbidden acts or words reflect the particular customs and views of the society. Among the Zuni Indians, it is improper to use the word *takka*, meaning "frogs," during a religious ceremony. In the world of Harry Potter, the evil Voldemort is not to be named, but is referred to as "You-Know-Who." In some religions believers are forbidden to "take the Lord's name in vain," and this prohibition often extends to other religious jargon. Thus the taboo words *hell* and *damn* are changed to *heck* and *darn*, though the results are sometimes not euphonious. Imagine the last two lines of Act II, Scene 1, of *Macbeth* if they were "cleaned up":

> Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
> That summons thee to heaven, or to heck

Words relating to sex, sex organs, and natural bodily functions make up a large part of the set of taboo words of many cultures. Often, two or more words or expressions can have the same linguistic meaning, with one acceptable and the other taboo. In English, words borrowed from Latin sound "scientific" and therefore appear to be technical and "clean," whereas native Anglo-Saxon counterparts are taboo. Such pairs of words are illustrated as follows:

Anglo-Saxon Taboo Words	Latinate Acceptable Words
cunt	vagina
cock	penis
prick	penis
tits	mammaries
shit	feces, defecate

There is no grammatical reason why the word *vagina* [vədʒãɪnə] is "clean" whereas *cunt* [kʌ̃nt] is "dirty," or why *balls* is taboo but *testicles* acceptable. Although there is no grammatical basis for such preferences, there certainly are sociolinguistic reasons to embrace or eschew such usages, just as there are socio-linguistic reasons for speaking formally, respectfully, disrespectfully, informally, jargon riddled, and so on.

Euphemisms

Banish the use of the four-letter words
Whose meaning is never obscure.
The Anglos, the Saxons, those bawdy old birds
Were vulgar, obscene, and impure.
But cherish the use of the weaseling phrase
That never quite says what it means;
You'd better be known for your hypocrite ways
Than vulgar, impure, and obscene.

**FOLK SONG ATTRIBUTED TO WARTIME ROYAL AIR FORCE
OF GREAT BRITAIN**

The existence of taboo words and ideas motivates the creation of **euphemisms**. A euphemism is a word or phrase that replaces a taboo word or serves to avoid frightening or unpleasant subjects. In many societies, because death is feared, there are many euphemisms related to this subject. People are less apt to *die* and more apt to *pass on* or *pass away*. Those who take care of your loved ones who have passed away are more likely to be *funeral directors* than *morticians* or *undertakers*. And then there's *feminine protection* . . .

The use of euphemisms is not new. It is reported that the Greek historian Plutarch in the first century C.E. wrote that "the ancient Athenians . . . used to cover up the ugliness of things with auspicious and kindly terms, giving them polite and endearing names. Thus they called harlots *companions*, taxes *contributions*, and prison a *chamber*."

Just as surely as all languages and societies have taboo words, they have euphemisms. The aforementioned taboo word *takka*, meaning "frogs," is replaced during a Zuni religious ceremony by a complex compound word that literally translates as "several-are-sitting-in-a-shallow-basin-where-they-are-in-liquid." The euphemisms for bodily excretions and sexual activity are legion, and lists of them may be found in online dictionaries of slang. There you will find such gems for urination as *siphon the python* and *point Percy at the porcelain*, and for intercourse *shag*, *hide the ferret* (*salami*, *sausage*), and *toss a little leg*, among a gazillion others.

These euphemisms, as well as the difference between the accepted Latinate "genteel" terms and the "dirty" Anglo-Saxon terms, show that a word or phrase has not only a linguistic **denotative meaning** but also a **connotative meaning** that reflects attitudes, emotions, value judgments, and so on. In learning a language, children learn which words are taboo, and these taboo words differ from one child to another, depending on the value system accepted in the family or group in which the child grows up.

Racial and National Epithets

The use of epithets for people of different religions, nationalities, or races tells us something about the speakers. Words like *kike* (for Jew), *wop* (for Italian), *nigger* or *coon* (for African American), *slant* (for Asian), *towelhead* (for Middle Eastern Arab), and so forth reflect racist and chauvinist views of society.

Even words that sound like epithets are perhaps to be avoided (see exercise 13). An administrator in Washington, D.C. described a fund he administers as "niggardly," meaning stingy. He resigned his position under fire for using a word "so close to a degrading word."

Language, however, is creative, malleable, and ever changing. The epithets used by a majority to demean a minority may be reclaimed as terms of bonding and friendship among members of the minority. Thus, for some—we emphasize *some*—African Americans, the word *nigger* is used to show affection. Similarly, the ordinarily degrading word *queer* is used among *some* gay persons as a term of endearment, as is *cripple* or *crip* among *some* individuals who share a disability.

Language and Sexism

doctor, n. . . . a man of great learning.

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE DICTIONARY, 1947

A businessman is aggressive; a businesswoman is pushy. A businessman is good on details; she's picky. . . . He follows through; she doesn't know when to quit. He stands firm; she's hard. . . . He isn't afraid to say what is on his mind; she's mouthy. He exercises authority diligently; she's power mad. He's closemouthed; she's secretive. He climbed the ladder of success; she slept her way to the top.

FROM "HOW TO TELL A BUSINESSMAN FROM A BUSINESSWOMAN," *The Balloon*, Graduate School of Management, UCLA, 1976

The discussion of obscenities, blasphemies, taboo words, and euphemisms showed that words of a language are not intrinsically good or bad, but reflect individual or societal values. This is also seen where a woman may be referred to as a *castrating female*, *ballsy women's libber*, or *courageous feminist advocate*, depending on who is talking.

Early dictionaries often gave clues to the social attitudes of that time. In some twentieth-century dictionaries, examples used to illustrate the meaning of words include "manly courage" and "masculine charm," as opposed to "womanish tears" and "feminine wiles." Contemporary dictionaries are far more enlightened and try to be scrupulous in avoiding sexist language.

Until recently, most people who heard "My cousin is a professor (or a doctor, or the chancellor of the university, or a steelworker)" would assume that the cousin is a man; if they heard "My cousin is a nurse (or elementary school teacher, or clerk-typist, or house worker)," they would conclude that the cousin is a woman. This is changing because society is changing and people of either sex commonly hold jobs once held primarily by one sex.

Despite flashes of enlightenment, words for women abound with abusive or sexual overtones: *dish*, *piece*, *piece of ass*, *piece of tail*, *bunny*, *chick*, *pussy*,

bitch, *doll*, *slut*, *cow*—to name just a few. Far fewer such sexual terms exist for men, and those that do, such as *boy toy*, *stud muffin*, *hunk*, or *jock*, are not pejorative in the same way.

It's clear that language reflects sexism. It reflects any societal attitude, positive or negative; languages are infinitely flexible and expressive. But is language itself amoral and neutral? Or is there something about language, or a particular language, that abets sexism? Before we attempt to answer that question, let's look more deeply into the subject, using English as the illustrative language.

Marked and Unmarked Forms

> If the English language had been properly organized . . . then there would be a word which meant both "he" and "she," and I could write, "If John or Mary comes, heesh will want to play tennis," which would save a lot of trouble.
>
> **A. A. MILNE,** *The Christopher Robin Birthday Book,* 1930

In chapter 3 we saw that with gradable antonyms such as *high/low*, one is marked (*low*) and the other unmarked. Ordinarily, the unmarked member of the pair is the one used in questions (*How high is the building?*), measurements (*The building is twenty stories high*), and so on.

Similar to this is an asymmetry between male and female terms in many languages where there are male/female pairs of words. The male form is generally unmarked and the female term is created by adding a bound morpheme. We have many such examples in English:

Male	Female
heir	heir**ess**
major	major**ette**
hero	hero**ine**
Robert	Robert**a**
equestrian	equestri**enne**
aviator	avia**trix**

When referring in general to the profession of acting, or flying, or riding horseback, the unmarked terms *actor*, *aviator*, and *equestrian* are used. The marked terms are used to emphasize the female gender.

Moreover, the unmarked third person pronoun in English is male (*he*, *him*, *his*). *Everybody had better pay his fee next time* allows for the client to be male or female, but *Everybody had better pay her fee next time* presupposes a female client. While there has been some attempt to neutralize the pronoun by using *they*, as in *Every teenager loves their first car*, most teachers find this objectionable and it is unlikely to become common practice. Other attempts to find a suitable genderless third person pronoun have produced such attempts as *e*, *hesh*, *po*, *tey*, *co*, *jhe*, *ve*, *xe*, *he'er*, *thon*, *na*, none of which speakers have the least inclination to adopt, and it appears likely that *he* and *she* are going to be with us for a while.

Since the advent of the feminist movement, many of the marked female forms have been replaced by the male forms, which are used to refer to either sex. Thus

women, as well as men, are authors, actors, poets, heroes, and heirs. Women, however, remain countesses, duchesses, and princesses, if they are among this small group of female aristocrats.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, discussed in chapter 6, proposes that the way a language encodes—puts into words—different categories like male and female subtly affects the way speakers of the language think about those categories. Thus, it may be argued that because English speakers are often urged to choose *he* as the unmarked pronoun (*Everyone should respect **him**self*), and to choose *she* only when the referent is overtly female, they tend to think of the male sex as predominant. Likewise, the fact that nouns require special affixes to make them feminine forces people to think in terms of male and female, with the female somehow more derivative because of affixing. The different titles, Mr., Mrs., Miss, and Ms., also emphasize the male/female distinction. Finally, the preponderance of words denigrating females in English and many other languages may create a climate that is more tolerant of sexist behavior.

Nevertheless, although people can undoubtedly be sexist and even cultures can be sexist, can language be sexist? That is, can we be molded by our language to be something we may not want to be? Or does language merely facilitate any natural inclinations we may have? Is it simply a reflection of societal values? These questions are disputed today by linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers, and no definitive answer has yet emerged.

Secret Languages and Language Games

Throughout the world and throughout history, people have invented secret languages and language games. They have used these special languages as a means of identifying with their group and/or to prevent outsiders from knowing what is being said. One such case is *Nushu*, the women's secret writing of Chinese, which originated in the third century as a means for women to communicate with one another in the sexually repressive societies of imperial China (see exercise 17, chapter 11). American slaves developed an elaborate code that could not be understood by the slave owners. References to "the promised land" or the "flight of the Israelites from Egypt" sung in spirituals were codes for the North and the Underground Railroad.

Language games such as Pig Latin[4] and Ubbi Dubbi (see exercise 7) are used for amusement by children and adults. They exist in all the world's languages and take a wide variety of forms. In some, a suffix is added to each word; in others a syllable is inserted after each vowel. There are rhyming games and games in which phonemes are reversed. A game in Brazil substitutes an /i/ for all the vowels.

The Walbiri, natives of central Australia, play a language game in which the meanings of words are distorted. In this play language, all nouns, verbs, pronouns, and adjectives are replaced by a semantically contrastive word. Thus, the sentence *Those men are small* means *This woman is big.*

---

[4]Dog is pronounced *og-day*, parrot as *arrot-pay*, and elephant as *elephant-may*, etc., but see exercise 6.

These language games provide evidence for the phonemes, words, morphemes, semantic features, and so on that are posited by linguists for descriptive grammars. They also illustrate the boundless creativity of human language and human speakers.

Summary

Every person has a unique way of speaking, called an **idiolect**. The language used by a group of speakers is a **dialect**. The dialects of a language are the mutually intelligible forms of that language that differ in systematic ways from each other. Dialects develop because languages change, and the changes that occur in one group or area may differ from those that occur in another. **Regional dialects** and **social dialects** develop for this reason. Some differences in U.S. regional dialects may be traced to the dialects spoken by colonial settlers from England. Those from southern England spoke one dialect and those from the north spoke another. In addition, the colonists who maintained close contact with England reflected the changes occurring in British English, while earlier forms were preserved among Americans who spread westward and broke communication with the Atlantic coast. The study of regional dialects has produced **dialect atlases**, with **dialect maps** showing the areas where specific dialect characteristics occur in the speech of the region. A boundary line called an **isogloss** delineates each area.

Social dialects arise when groups are isolated socially, such as Americans of African descent in the United States, many of whom speak dialects collectively called African American (Vernacular) English, which are distinct from the dialects spoken by non-Africans.

Dialect differences include phonological or pronunciation differences (often called **accents**), vocabulary distinctions, and syntactic rule differences. The grammar differences among dialects are not as great as the similarities, thus permitting speakers of different dialects to communicate.

In many countries, one dialect or dialect group is viewed as the **standard**, such as **Standard American English (SAE)**. Although this particular dialect is not linguistically superior, some language purists consider it the only correct form of the language. Such a view has led to the idea that some nonstandard dialects are deficient, as is erroneously suggested regarding **African American English** (sometimes referred to as **Ebonics**), a collection of dialects used by some African Americans. A study of African American English shows it to be as logical, complete, rule-governed, and expressive as any other dialect. This is also true of the dialects spoken by Latino Americans whose native language or those of their parents is Spanish. There are bilingual and monolingual Latino speakers of English. One Latino dialect spoken in the Southwest, referred to as **Chicano English (ChE)**, shows systematic phonological and syntactic differences from SAE that stem from the influence of Spanish. Other differences are shared with many nonstandard ethnic and nonethnic dialects. **Codeswitching** is shifting between languages within a single sentence or discourse by a bilingual speaker. It reflects both grammars working simultaneously and does not represent a form of "broken" English or Spanish or whatever language.

Attempts to legislate the use of a particular dialect or language have been made throughout history and exist today, even extending to banning the use of languages other than the preferred one.

In areas where many languages are spoken, one language may become a **lingua franca** to ease communication among people. In other cases, where traders, missionaries, or travelers need to communicate with people who speak a language unknown to them, a **pidgin** may develop. A pidgin is a simplified system with properties of both the **superstrate** (**lexifier**) and **substrate** languages. When a pidgin is widely used, and constitutes the primary linguistic input to children, it is *creolized*. The grammars of **creole** languages are similar to those of other languages, and languages of creole origin now exist in many parts of the world and include sign languages of the deaf.

The study of language has important implications for education especially as regards reading instruction, and the teaching of second language learners, language-minority students, and speakers of nonstandard dialects. Several second-language teaching methods have been proposed for adult second language learners. Some of them focus more on the grammatical aspects of the target language, and others focus more on getting students to communicate in the target language, with less regard for grammatical accuracy.

Writing and reading, unlike speaking and understanding, must be deliberately taught. Three methods of teaching reading have been used in the United States: *whole-word*, *whole-language*, and *phonics*. In the whole-word and whole-language approaches, children are taught to recognize entire words without regard to individual letters and sounds. The phonics approach emphasizes the spelling-sound correspondences of the language, and thus draws on the child's innate phonological knowledge.

Immigrant children must acquire English (or whatever the majority language is in a particular country). Younger students must at the same time acquire literacy skills (reading and writing), and students of all ages must learn content material such as math, science, and so on. This is a formidable task. **Bilingual education** programs are designed to help achieve these multiple aims by teaching children literacy and content material in their native language while they are acquiring English. Research has shown that immigrant children benefit from instruction in their native language, but many people oppose these programs.

Children who speak a nonstandard dialect of English that differs from the language of instruction may also be at a disadvantage in a school setting, especially in learning reading and writing. There have been contentious debates over the use of Ebonics in the classroom as a method for helping speakers of AAE learn Standard English.

Besides regional and social dialects, speakers may use different **styles**, or **registers**, depending on the context. **Slang** is not often used in formal situations or writing but is widely used in speech; **argot** and **jargon** refer to the unique vocabulary used by particular groups of people to facilitate communication, provide a means of bonding, and exclude outsiders.

In all societies, certain acts or behaviors are frowned on, forbidden, or considered **taboo**. The words or expressions referring to these taboo acts are then also avoided or considered "dirty." Language cannot be obscene or clean; attitudes toward specific words or linguistic expressions reflect the views of a culture or

society toward the behaviors and actions of the language users. At times, slang words may be taboo where scientific or standard terms with the same meaning are acceptable in "polite society." Taboo words and acts give rise to **euphemisms**, which are words or phrases that replace the expressions to be avoided. Thus, *powder room* is a euphemism for *toilet*, which started as a euphemism for *lavatory*, which is now more acceptable than its replacement.

Just as the use of some words may indicate society's views toward sex, natural bodily functions, or religious beliefs, some words may also indicate racist, chauvinist, or sexist attitudes. Language is not intrinsically racist or sexist but reflects the views of various sectors of a society. However, the availability of offensive terms, and particular grammatical peculiarities such as the lack of a genderless third-person singular pronoun, may perpetuate and reinforce biased views and be demeaning and insulting to those addressed. Thus culture influences language, and, arguably, language may have an influence on the culture in which it is spoken.

The invention or construction of secret languages and language games like Pig Latin attest to human creativity with language and the unconscious knowledge that speakers have of the phonological, morphological, and semantic rules of their language.

References for Further Reading

Carver, C. M. 1987. *American regional dialects: A word geography.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Cassidy, F. G. (chief ed.). 1985, 1991, 1996, 2002. *Dictionary of American regional English,* Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chambers, J., and P. Trudgill. 1998. *Dialectology*, 2nd edn. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Finegan, E., and J. Rickford (eds.). 2004. *Language in the USA*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Holm, J. 2000. *An introduction to pidgins and creoles*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Labov, W. 1972. *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

_____. 1969. The logic of nonstandard English. *Georgetown University 20th Annual Round Table, Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics*, No. 22.

_____. 1966. *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Lakoff, R. 1990. *Talking power: The politics of language*. New York: Basic Books.

Roberts, I. 1999. Verb movement and markedness. In Michel DeGraff (ed.), *Language creation and language change, creolization, diachrony and development*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 287–327.

Tannen, D. 1994. *Gender and discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____. 1990. *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Ballantine.

Trudgill, P. 2001. *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society*, 4th edn. London: Penguin Books.

Wolfram, W., and N. Schilling-Estes. 1998. *American English dialects and variation*. London: Blackwell Publishers.