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Here are some systematic differences:<sup>10</sup>

1. Chapters 6 and 7 discussed the fact that English has eleven stressed vowel phonemes (not counting the three diphthongs): /i, I, e, ε, æ, u, U, o, ɔ, a, A/. Spanish, however, has only five: /i, e, u, o, a/. Chicano speakers whose native language is Spanish may substitute the Spanish vowel system for the English. When this is done, a number of homonyms result that have distinct pronunciations in SAE. Thus *ship* and *sheep* are both pronounced like *sheep* /ʃip/, *rid* is pronounced like *read* /rid/, and so on. Chicano speakers whose native language is English may make these substitutions but have the full set of American English vowels.
2. Alternation of *ch* /ç/ and *sh* /ʃ/; *show* is pronounced as if spelled with a *ch* /ço/ and *check* as if spelled with an *sh* /ʃek/.
3. Devoicing of some consonants, such as /z/ in *easy* /isi/ and *guys* /gajs/.
4. The substitution of /t/ for /θ/ and /d/ for /ð/ word initially, as in /tin/ for *thin* and /de/ for *they*.
5. Word-final consonant cluster simplification. *War* and *ward* are both pronounced /war/; *star* and *start* are /star/. This process may also delete past-tense suffixes (*poked* becomes /pok/) and third-person singular agreement (*He loves her* becomes *he love her*), by a process similar to that in AAE. Alveolar-cluster simplification has become widespread among all dialects of English, even among SAE speakers, and although it is a process often singled out for ChE and AAE speakers, this is really no longer dialect specific.
6. Prosodic aspects of speech in ChE, such as stress and intonation, also differ from SAE. Stress, for example, may occur on a different syllable in ChE than in SAE.
7. The Spanish sequential constraint, which does not permit a word to begin with an /s/ cluster, is sometimes carried over to ChE. Thus *scare* may be pronounced as if it were spelled *escare* /esker/, and *school* as if it were spelled *eschool*.

#### SYNTACTIC VARIABLES IN ChE

There are also regular syntactic differences between ChE and SAE. In Spanish, a negative sentence includes a negative morpheme before the verb even if another negative appears; thus negative concord (“double negatives”) is a regular rule of ChE syntax:

SAE	ChE
I don't have any money.	I don have no money.
I don't want anything.	I no want nothin.

Another regular difference between ChE and SAE is in the use of the comparative *more* to mean *more often* and the preposition *out from* to mean *away from*, as in the following:

<sup>10</sup> J. Penfield and J. L. Ornstein-Galicia. 1985. *Chicano English: An Ethnic Contact*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Information on ChE was also provided by Otto Santa Ana.

## SAE

I use English more often.  
 They use Spanish more often.  
 They hope to get away from  
 their problems.

## ChE

I use English more.  
 They use more Spanish.  
 They hope to get out from  
 their problems.

Lexical differences also occur, such as the use of *borrow* in ChE for *lend* in SAE (*Borrow me a pencil*) as well as many other substitutions.

As noted, many Chicano speakers (and speakers of AAE) are bidialectal; they can use either ChE (or AAE) or SAE, depending on the social situation.

## Lingua Francas

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Language is a steed that carries one into a far country.

Arab proverb

Many areas of the world are populated by people who speak diverse languages. In such areas, where groups desire social or commercial communication, one language is often used by common agreement. Such a language is called a **lingua franca**.

In medieval times, a trade language based largely on the languages that became modern Italian and Provençal came into use in the Mediterranean ports. That language was called *Lingua Franca*, "Frankish language." The term *lingua franca* was generalized to other languages similarly used. Thus, any language can be a *lingua franca*.

English has been called "the *lingua franca* of the whole world." French, at one time, was "the *lingua franca* of diplomacy." Latin was a *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire and of western Christendom for a millennium, just as Greek served eastern Christendom as its *lingua franca*. Among Jews, Yiddish has long served as a *lingua franca*.

More frequently, *lingua francas* serve as trade languages. East Africa is populated by hundreds of villages, each speaking its own language, but most Africans of this area learn at least some Swahili as a second language, and this *lingua franca* is used and understood in nearly every marketplace. A similar situation exists in Nigeria, where Hausa is the *lingua franca*.

Hindi and Urdu are the *lingua francas* of India and Pakistan. The linguistic situation of this area of the world is so complex that there are often regional *lingua francas* — usually a local language surrounding a commercial center. Thus the Dravidian language Kannada is a *lingua franca* for the area surrounding the southwestern Indian city of Mysore. The same situation existed in Imperial China.

In modern China, the Chinese language as a whole is often referred to as *Zhongwen*, which technically refers to the written language, whereas *Zhongguo hua* refers to the spoken language. Ninety-four percent of the people living in the People's Republic of China are said to speak Han languages, which can be divided into eight major dialects (or language groups) that for the most part are mutually unintelligible. Within each group there are hundreds of dialects. In addition to these Han languages, there are more

than fifty “national minority” languages, including the five principal ones: Mongolian, Uighur, Tibetan, Zhuang, and Korean. The situation is complex, and for this reason an extensive language reform policy was inaugurated to spread a standard language, called *Putonghua*, which embodies the pronunciation of the Beijing dialect, the grammar of northern Chinese dialects, and the vocabulary of modern colloquial Chinese. The native languages and dialects are not considered inferior. Rather, the approach is to spread the “common speech” (the literal meaning of *Putonghua*) so that all may communicate with each other in this lingua franca.

Certain lingua francas arise naturally; others are developed by government policy and intervention. In many places of the world, however, people still cannot speak with neighbors only a few miles away.

## Pidgins and Creoles

Padi dem; kontri; una ol we de na Rom.  
Mek una ol kak una yes. A kam ber Siza,  
a no kam prez am.

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.2, translated to Krio by Thomas Decker

### Pidgins

I include ‘pidgin-English’ . . . even though I am referred to in that splendid language as ‘Fella belong Mrs. Queen.

Prince Philip, Husband of Queen Elizabeth II

A lingua franca is typically a language with a broad base of native speakers, likely to be used and learned by persons whose native language is in the same language family. Often in history, however, traders and missionaries from one part of the world have visited and attempted to communicate with peoples residing in another distant part. In such cases, the contact is too specialized, and the cultures too widely separated, for the usual kind of lingua franca to arise. Instead, the two (or possibly more) groups use their native languages as a basis for a rudimentary language of few lexical items and less complex grammatical rules. Such a “marginal language” is called a **pidgin**.

There are a number of pidgins in the world, including many based on English. Tok Pisin is an English-based pidgin that is widely used in Papua New Guinea. Like most pidgins, many of its lexical items and much of its structure are based on only one language of the two or more contact languages, in this case English. The variety of Tok Pisin used as a primary language in urban centers is more highly developed and more complex than the Tok Pisin used as a lingua franca in remote areas. 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.

Although pidgins are in some sense rudimentary, they are not devoid of grammar. The phonological system is rule-governed, as in any human language. The inventory of

phonemes is generally small, and each phoneme may have many allophonic pronunciations. In Tok Pisin, for example, [č], [š], and [s] are all possible pronunciations of the phoneme /s/; [masin], [mašin], and [mačin] all mean "machine."

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.

With their small vocabularies, however, pidgins are not good at expressing fine distinctions of meaning. Many lexical items bear a heavy semantic burden, with context relied on to remove ambiguity. Much circumlocution and metaphorical extension is necessary. All of these factors combine to give pidgins a unique flavor. What could be a friendlier definition of "friend" than the Australian aborigine's *him brother belong me*, or more poetic than this description of the sun: *lamp belong Jesus*? A policeman is *gubmint catchum-fella*, whiskers are *grass belong face*, and when a man is thirsty *him belly allatime burn*.

Pidgin has come to have negative connotations, perhaps because the best-known pidgins are all associated with European colonial empires. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* once described Pidgin English as "an unruly bastard jargon, filled with nursery imbecilities, vulgarisms and corruptions." It no longer uses such a definition. In recent times there is greater recognition that pidgins reflect human creative linguistic ability, as is beautifully revealed by the Chinese servant asking whether his master's prize sow had given birth to a litter: *Him cow pig have kittens?* as well as the description of Prince Philip, the husband of Queen Elizabeth of England, quoted in the epigraph to this section.

Some people would like to eradicate pidgins. Through massive education, English replaced a pidgin spoken on New Zealand by the Maoris. The government of China at the time forbade the use of Chinese Pidgin English. It died out by the end of the nineteenth century because the Chinese gained access to English, which proved to be more useful in communicating with non-Chinese speakers.

Pidgins have been unjustly maligned; they may serve a useful function.<sup>11</sup> For example, a New Guinean can learn Tok Pisin well enough in six months to begin many kinds of semiprofessional training. To learn English for the same purpose might require ten times as long. In an area with more than eight hundred mutually unintelligible languages, Tok Pisin plays a vital role in unifying similar cultures.

During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, many pidgins sprang up along the coasts of China, Africa, and the New World to accommodate the Europeans. Chinook Jargon was a pidgin combining features from Nootka, Chinook, various Salishan languages, French, and English. Various tribes used it among themselves for commercial purposes, as well as with the European traders who had come to the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

Some linguists have suggested that Proto-Germanic (the earliest form of the Germanic languages) was originally a pidgin, arguing that ordinary linguistic change cannot explain certain striking differences between the Germanic tongues and other Indo-European languages. They theorized that in the first millennium B.C.E. the primitive Germanic tribes that resided along the Baltic Sea traded with the more sophisticated, seagoing cultures. The two peoples communicated by means of a pidgin, which either

<sup>11</sup> R. A. Hall. 1955. *Hands Off Pidgin English*. New South Wales: Pacific Publications.

grossly affected Proto-Germanic, or actually became Proto-Germanic. If this is true, English, German, Dutch, and Yiddish had humble beginnings as a pidgin.

Case, tense, mood, and voice are generally absent from pidgins. One cannot, however, speak an English pidgin by merely using English without inflecting verbs or declining pronouns. Pidgins are not “baby talk” or Hollywood’s version of American Indians talking English. *Me Tarzan, you Jane* may be understood, but it is not pidgin as it is used in West Africa.

Pidgins are rule-governed. If they were not, no one could learn them. In Tok Pisin, most verbs that take a direct object must have the suffix *-m* or *-im*, even if the direct object is absent. Here are some examples of the application of this rule of the language:

Tok Pisin: Mi driman long kilim wanpela snek.  
 English: I dream of killing a snake.  
 Tok Pisin: Bandarap i bin kukim.  
 English: Bandarap cooked (it).

Other rules determine word order, which, as in English, is usually quite strict in pidgins because of the lack of case endings on nouns.

The set of pronouns is often simpler in pidgins. In Cameroonian Pidgin (CP), which is also an English-based pidgin, the pronoun system does not show gender or all the case differences that exist in Standard English (SE).<sup>12</sup>

CP			SE		
a	mi	ma	I	me	my
yu	yu	yu	you	you	your
i	i/am	i	he	him	his
i	i/am	i	she	her	her
wi	wi	wi	we	us	our
wuna	wuna	wuna	you	you	your
dem	dem/am	dem	they	them	their

Pidgins also may have fewer prepositions than the languages on which they are based. In CP, for example, *fɔ* means “to,” “at,” “in,” “for,” and “from,” as shown in the following examples:

Gif di buk fɔ mi.	“Give the book to me.”
I dei fɔ fam.	“She is at the farm.”
Dem dei fɔ chɔs.	“They are in the church.”
Du dis wan fɔ mi, a beg.	“Do this for me, please.”
Di mɔni dei fɔ tebul.	“The money is on the table.”
You fit muf ten frank fɔ ma kwa.	“You can take ten francs from my bag.”

Characteristics of pidgins differ in detail from one pidgin to another, and often vary depending on the native language of the pidgin speaker. Thus the verb generally comes

<sup>12</sup> The data from CP are from L. Todd, 1984. *Modern Englishes: Pidgins & Creoles*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

at the end of a sentence for a Japanese speaker of Hawaiian Pidgin English (as in *The poor people all potato eat*), whereas a Filipino speaker of this pidgin puts it before the subject (*Work hard these people*).

## Creoles

One distinguishing characteristic of pidgin languages is that no one learns them as native speakers. When a pidgin comes to be adopted by a community as its native tongue, and children learn it as a first language, that language is called a **creole**; the pidgin has become **creolized**.

The term *creole* is Portuguese and originally meant “a white man of European descent born and raised in a tropical or semitropical colony” The meaning shifted and “subsequently applied to certain languages spoken . . . in and around the Caribbean and in West Africa, and then more generally to other similar languages.”<sup>13</sup>

Creoles often arose on slave plantations in certain areas where Africans of many different tribes could communicate only via the plantation pidgin. Haitian Creole, based on French, developed in this way, as did the “English” spoken in parts of Jamaica. Gullah is an English-based creole spoken by the descendants of African slaves on islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. Louisiana Creole, related to Haitian Creole, is spoken by large numbers of blacks and whites in Louisiana. Krio, the language spoken by as many as a million Sierra Leoneans, developed, at least in part, from an English-based pidgin.

Creoles become fully developed languages, having more lexical items and a broader array of grammatical distinctions than pidgins. In time, they become languages as complete in every way as other languages.

The study of pidgins and creoles has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the nature of human language and the genetically determined constraints on grammars.

## Styles, Slang, and Jargon

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Slang is language which takes off its coat, spits on its hands — and goes to work.

Carl Sandburg

## 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

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<sup>13</sup> S. Romaine. 1988. *Pidgin and Creole Languages*. London/New York: Longman, p. 38.

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?* Similarly, *Are you going to take the Linguistics 1 course?* can be abbreviated to *You gonna take the Ling 1 course?* or simply *Gonna take Ling 1?* but not to *\*Are gonna take Ling 1?* Informal talk is not anarchy, but the rules are more liberal with regard to deletion, contraction, word choice, and so on, than the grammar rules of the formal language.

It is common for speakers to have competence in a number of styles, ranging between the two extremes of formal and informal. Speakers of minority dialects sometimes display virtuosic ability to slide back and forth along a continuum of styles that range from the informal patterns of street talk to formal standard classroom talk. When William Labov was studying African American English used by Harlem youths, he encountered difficulties because the youths (subconsciously) adopted a different style in the presence of strangers. It took time and effort to gain their confidence to the point where they would forget that their conversations were being recorded and so use their less formal style.

Many cultures have rules of social behavior that govern style. In some Indo-European languages there is the distinction 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. French even has a verb *tutoyer*, which means "to use the *tu* form," and German uses the verb *duzen* to refer to the informal or less honorific style of speaking.

Other languages have a much more elaborate code of style usage. Speakers of Thai use *kin*, "eat," to their intimates, to show contempt for people such as criminals, or when talking about animals. *Thaan*, "eat," is used informally with nonintimates, whereas *rabprathaan*, "eat," is used on formal occasions or when conversing with dignitaries or esteemed persons (such as grandparents). *Chan*, "eat," is used exclusively when referring to Buddhist monks. Japanese and Javanese are also languages with elaborate styles that must be adhered to in certain social situations.

## Slang

One mark of an informal style is the frequent occurrence of **slang**. Almost everyone uses slang on some occasions, but it is not easy to define the word. Slang has been defined as "one of those things that everybody can recognize and nobody can define."<sup>14</sup> The use of slang, or colloquial language, introduces 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 *pooped*. Finally, slang often consists of ascribing entirely new meanings to old

<sup>14</sup> P. Roberts. 1958. *Understanding English*. New York: Harper & Row, p. 342.





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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. *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. This confusion seems always to have been around. In 1890, John S. Farmer, coeditor with W. E. Henley of *Slang and Its Analogues*, remarked: "The borderland between slang and the 'Queen's English' is an ill-defined territory, the limits of which have never been clearly mapped out."

Earlier, in 1792, Friedrich Christian Laukhard wrote: "It is common knowledge that students have a language that is quite peculiar to them and that is not understood very well outside student society." The situation has not changed. Many college campuses publish a slang dictionary that gives college students the hip words they need to be cizool ("cool"), many of them for drinking and sex.

One generation's slang is another generation's standard vocabulary. *Fan* (as in "Dodger fan") was once a slang term, short for *fanatic*. *Phone*, too, was once a slangy, clipped version of *telephone*, as *TV* was of *television*. In Shakespeare's time, *fretful* and *dwindle* were slang, and more recently *blimp* and *hot dog* were both "hard-core" slang.

The use of slang varies from region to region, so slang in New York and slang in Los Angeles differ. The word *slang* itself is slang in British English for "scold."

Slang words and phrases are often "invented" in keeping with new ideas and customs. They may represent "in" attitudes better than the more conservative items of the vocabulary. Their importance is shown by the fact that it was thought necessary to give the returning Vietnam prisoners of war a glossary of eighty-six new slang words and phrases, from *acid* to *zonked*. The words on this list — prepared by the Air Force — had come into use during only five years. Furthermore, by the time this book was published, many of these terms may have passed out of the language, and many new ones added.

A number of slang words have entered English from the underworld, such as *crack* for a special form of *cocaine*, *payola*, *C-note*, *G-man*, *to hang paper* ("to write 'bum' checks"), *sawbuck*, and so forth. Prison slang has given us *con* ("a convicted prisoner"), *brek* ("young offender, from *breakfast*), *burn* (tobacco or cigarettes), *peter* ("cell"), and *screw* (prison officer).

Slang even emanates from the White House of the U.S. Capitol. Writers are called *pencils*, newspaper photographers are *stills*, TV camera operators are *sticks* (a reference to their tripods), and the *football* refers to the black box of national security secrets that the president's *mil aide* carries everywhere.

The now ordinary French word meaning "head," *tête*, was once a slang word derived from the Latin *testa*, which meant "earthen pot." Some slang words persist in the language, though, never changing their status from slang to "respectable." Shakespeare used the expression *beat it* to mean "scram" (or more politely, "leave!"), and most English speakers would still consider *beat it* a slang expression. Similarly, the use of the word *pig* for "policeman" goes back at least as far as 1785, when a writer of the time called a Bow Street police officer a "China Street pig."

## Jargon and Argot

Police are notorious for creating new words by shortening existing ones, such as *perp* for perpetrator, *ped* for pedestrian and *wit* for witness. More baffling to court reporters is the gang member who . . . might testify that he was in his *hoopty* around *dimday* when some *mud duck* with a *tray-eight* tried to take him *out of the box*. Translation: The man was in his car about dusk when a woman armed with a .38 caliber gun tried to kill him.

*Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1986

Practically every conceivable science, profession, trade, and occupation has its own set of words, some of which are considered "slang" and others "technical," depending on the status of the people using these "in" words. Such words are sometimes 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.

The existence of argots or jargons is illustrated by the story of a seaman witness being cross-examined at a trial, who was asked if he knew the plaintiff. Indicating that he did not know what *plaintiff* meant brought a chide from the attorney: "You mean you came into this court as a witness and don't know what 'plaintiff' means?" Later the sailor was asked where he was standing when the boat lurched. "Abaft the binnacle," was the reply, and to the attorney's questioning stare he responded: "You mean you came into this court and don't know where abaft the binnacle is?"

Because the jargon used by different professional 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 huge jargon of "computerese" used by computer "hackers" and others. So vast is this specialized vocabulary that *Webster's New World Computer Dictionary* has 400 pages and contains thousands of computer terms as entries. A few such words that are familiar to most people are *modem* (from *modulator-demodulator*); *bit* (from *binary digit*); and *byte* (eight *bits*). Acronyms are rampant in computer jargon. *ROM* (read-only memory), *RAM* (random-access memory), *CPU* (central processing unit), and *CD* (compact disk) are a small fraction of what's out there.

Many jargon terms pass into the standard language. Jargon, like slang, spreads from a narrow group until it is used and understood by a large segment of the population.

## Taboo or Not Taboo?

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Sex is a four-letter word.

Bumper sticker slogan

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 above would undoubtedly censure this “dirty” word.

Words that are not acceptable in America are acceptable in England and vice versa. And the acceptance changes over time. In the 1830s, a British visitor to America, Fanny Trollope, remarked:

Hardly a day passed in which I did not discover something or other which I had been taught to consider as natural as eating, was held in abhorrence by those around me; many words to which I had never heard an objectionable meaning attached, were totally interdicted, and the strangest paraphrastic phrases substituted.

Some of the words that were taboo at that time in America but not in England were *corset*, *shirt*, *leg*, and *woman*. Fanny Trollope remarked:

The ladies here have an extreme aversion to being called women . . . Their idea is, that that term designates only the lower or less-refined classes of female human-kind. This is a mistake which I wonder they should fall into, for in all countries in the world, queens, duchesses, and countesses, are called women.

Certain words in all societies are considered **taboo** — they are not to be used, or at least, not in “polite company.” The word *taboo* was borrowed from Tongan, a Polynesian language, in which it refers to acts that are forbidden or to be avoided. When an act is taboo, reference to this act may also become taboo. That is, first you are forbidden to do something; then you are forbidden to talk about it.

Forbidden acts or words reflect the particular customs and views of the society. Some words may be used in certain circumstances and not in others. Among the Zuni In-



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

Drawn by Edward Koren; copyright © 1993 The New Yorker Collection. All rights reserved.

dians, it is improper to use the word *takka*, meaning "frogs," during a religious ceremony; a complex compound word must be used instead, which literally translated would be "several-are-sitting-in-a-shallow-basin-where-they-are-in-liquid."<sup>15</sup>

In the world of Harry Potter, the evil Voldemort is not to be named, but is referred to as "You-Know-Who." In certain societies, words that have religious connotations are considered profane if used outside of formal or religious ceremonies. Christians are forbidden to "take the Lord's name in vain," and this prohibition has been extended to the use of curses, which are believed to have magical powers. Thus *hell* and *damn* are changed to *heck* and *darn*, perhaps with the belief or hope that this change will fool the "powers that be." 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

Loses a little something, wouldn't you say?

<sup>15</sup> P. Farb. 1975. *Word Play*. New York: Bantam.

In England the word *bloody* is, or perhaps was, a taboo word. In Shaw's *Pygmalion* the following lines "startled London and indeed, flustered the whole Empire," according to the British scholar Eric Partridge,<sup>16</sup> when the play was first produced in London in 1910.

"Are you walking across the Park, Miss Doolittle?"

"Walk! Not bloody likely. I am going in a taxi."

Partridge adds, "Much of the interest in the play was due to the heroine's utterance of this banned word. It was waited for with trembling, heard shudderingly."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that *bloody* has been in general colloquial use from the Restoration and is "now constantly in the mouths of the lowest classes, but by respectable people considered 'a horrid word' on a par with obscene or profane language, and usually printed in the newspapers 'b\_\_\_\_\_y.'" The origin of the term is not quite certain. One view is that the word is derived from an oath involving the "blood of Christ"; another that it relates to menstruation. The scholars do not agree and the public has no idea. This uncertainty itself gives us a clue about "dirty" words: People who use them often do not know why they are taboo, only that they are, and to some extent they remain in the language to give vent to strong emotion.

Words relating to sex, sex organs, and natural bodily functions make up a large part of the set of taboo words of many cultures. Some languages have no native words to mean "sexual intercourse" but do borrow such words from neighboring people. Other languages have many words for this common and universal act, most of which are taboo.

Two or more words or expressions can have the same linguistic meaning, with one acceptable and the others the cause of embarrassment or horror. In English, words borrowed from Latin sound "scientific" and therefore appear to be technical and "clean," whereas native Anglo-Saxon counterparts are taboo. This fact reflects the opinion that the vocabulary used by the upper classes was superior to that used by the lower classes, a distinction going back at least to the Norman Conquest in 1066, when "a duchess perspired and expectorated and menstruated — while a kitchen maid sweated and spat and bled."<sup>17</sup> Such pairs of words are illustrated below:

Anglo-Saxon Taboo Words	Latinate Acceptable Words
cunt	vagina
cock	penis
prick	penis
tits	breasts
shit	feces

There is no linguistic reason why the word *vagina* is "clean" whereas *cunt* is "dirty" or why *prick* or *cock* is taboo but *penis* is acknowledged as referring to part of the male

<sup>16</sup> As quoted in "The History of Some 'Dirty' Words" by Falk Johnson. 1950. In *The American Mercury*, Vol. 71, pp. 538–45.

<sup>17</sup> P. Farb. 1975. *Word Play*. New York: Bantam.

anatomy, or why everyone *defecates* but only vulgar people *shit*. Many people even avoid words like *breasts*, *intercourse*, and *testicles* as much as words like *tits*, *fuck*, and *balls*. There is no linguistic basis for such views, but pointing this fact out does not imply advocating the use or nonuse of any words.

## 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 stimulates 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 a number of 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*.



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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*."

The poem, quoted above, exhorts against such euphemisms, as another verse demonstrates:

When in calling, plain speaking is out;  
 When the ladies (God bless 'em) are milling about,  
 You may wet, make water, or empty the glass;  
 You can powder your nose, or the "johnny" will pass.  
 It's a drain for the lily, or man about dog  
 When everyone's drunk, it's condensing the fog;  
 But sure as the devil, that word with a hiss,  
 It's only in Shakespeare that characters \_\_\_\_\_.

Some scholars are bemused with the attitudes revealed by the use of euphemisms. A journal, *Maledicta*, subtitled *The International Journal of Verbal Aggression* and edited by Reinhold Aman, "specializes in uncensored glossaries and studies of all offensive and negatively valued words and expressions, in all languages and from all cultures, past and present." A review of this journal by Bill Katz in the *Library Journal* (November 1977) points out, "The history of the dirty word or phrase is the focus of this substantial . . . journal [whose articles] are written in a scholarly yet entertaining fashion by professors . . . as well as by a few outsiders."

A scholarly study of Australian English euphemisms shows the considerable creativity involved.<sup>18</sup>

<i>urinate:</i>	drain the dragon syphon the python water the horse squeeze the lemon drain the spuds wring the rattlesnake shake hands with the wife's best friend point Percy at the porcelain train Terence on the terracotta
<i>have intercourse:</i>	shag root crack a fat dip the wick play hospital hide the ferret play cars and garages hide the egg roll (sausage, salami) . boil bangers slip a length go off like a beltfed motor go like a rat up a rhododendron go like a rat up a drain pipe have a northwest cocktail

<sup>18</sup> J. Powell. 1972. Paper delivered at the Western Conference of Linguistics, University of Oregon.

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 not only has a linguistic **denotative meaning** but also has 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 users of these words. The word *boy* is not a taboo word when used generally, but when a twenty-year-old white man calls a forty-year-old African American man “boy,” the word takes on an additional meaning; it reflects the racist attitude of the speaker. So also, 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 express racist and chauvinist views of society.

Such epithets are found under surprising circumstances. The chairman of the Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau in North Carolina was quoted in the newspaper<sup>19</sup> as saying: “If we had a shabby-looking place, we wouldn’t have a Chinaman’s chance of attracting the people we need to do business with.” One is tempted to observe that the chances of attracting any of the 1.2 billion potential Chinese tourists might be lessened by such statements.

Even words that sound like epithets are probably to be avoided. 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.”

The use of the verbs *to jew* or *to gyp/jip* also reflect the stereotypical views of Jews and Gypsies. Most people do not realize that *gyp*, which is used to mean “cheat,” comes from the view that Gypsies are duplicitous. In time these words would either disappear or lose their racist connotations if bigotry and oppression ceased to exist, but since they show no signs of doing so, the use of such words perpetuates stereotypes, separates one people from another, and reflects racism.

Language, however, is creative, malleable, and ever changing. The very 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* among *some* individuals who share a disability.

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<sup>19</sup> *Raleigh News and Observer*, February 22, 1999.



## Language, Sex, and Gender

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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. . . . His judgments are her prejudices. He is a man of the world; she's been around. 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,"  
Graduate School of Management, UCLA, *The Balloon* XXII, (6).

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. In addition, one speaker may use a word with positive connotations while another may select a different word with negative connotations to refer to the same person. For example, a person may be called a *terrorist* or a *freedom fighter* depending on who is doing the calling. A woman may be a *castrating female* (or *ballsly women's libber*) or may be a *courageous feminist advocate*, again depending on whose talking. The words we use to refer to certain individuals or groups reflect our individual nonlinguistic attitudes and may reflect the culture and views of society.

Language reflects sexism in society. Language itself is not sexist, just as it is not obscene; but it can connote sexist attitudes as well as attitudes about social taboos or racism.

Dictionaries often give clues to social attitudes. In the 1969 edition of *the American Heritage Dictionary*, examples used to illustrate the meaning of words include "manly courage" and "masculine charm." Women do not fare as well, as exemplified by "womanish tears" and "feminine wiles." In *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1961), *honorarium* is defined as "a payment to a professional man for services on which no fee is set or legally obtainable." Attempts to deflect the inherent sexism in such definitions by claiming that *man* actually means "human" was deftly parried in 1973:

If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is *Man overboard*. If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is *manslaughter*. If she is injured on the job, the coverage is *workmen's compensation*. But if she arrives at the threshold marked *Men Only*, she knows the admonition is not intended to bar animals or plants or inanimate objects. It is meant for her.<sup>20</sup>

Until 1972, at Columbia University, the women's faculty toilet doors were labeled "Women," whereas the men's doors were labeled "Officers of Instruction." Yet, linguistically, the word *officer* is not marked semantically for gender. There were apparently few women professors at Columbia at that time, which was reflected in these

<sup>20</sup> A. Graham. "How to Make Troubles: The Making of a Nonsexist Dictionary." *Ms.*, December 1973.

designations. This shows that nonlinguistic aspects of society may influence our interpretation of the meaning of words. Thus, at least until recently, most people hearing *My cousin is a professor* (or a *doctor*, or *the Chancellor of the University*, or a *steel worker*) would assume that the cousin is a man. This assumption has nothing to do with the English language but a great deal to do with the fact that, historically, women have not been prominent in these positions. This is beginning to change, as more women become professors, doctors, chancellors, and political leaders.

On the other hand, if you heard someone say *My cousin is a nurse* (or *elementary school teacher*, or *clerk-typist*, or *house worker*), you would probably conclude that the speaker's cousin is a woman. It is less evident why the sentence *My neighbor is a blond* is understood as referring to a woman. It may be that hair color is a primary category of classification for women. If this is so, it is a linguistic fact and suggests, as discussed in chapter 4, that *blond* has a [+female] feature associated with it in the lexicon.

Studies analyzing the language used by men in reference to women, which often has derogatory or sexual connotations, indicate that such terms go far back into history, and sometimes enter the language with no pejorative implications but gradually gain them. Thus, from Old English *huswif*, "housewife," the word *hussy* was derived. In their original employment, "a laundress made beds, a needlewoman came to sew, a spinster tended the spinning wheel, and a nurse cared for the sick. But all apparently acquired secondary duties in some households, because all became euphemisms for a mistress or a prostitute at some time during their existence."<sup>21</sup>

Words for women — all with abusive or sexual overtones — abound: *dish*, *tomato*, *piece*, *piece of ass*, *chick*, *piece of tail*, *bunny*, *pussy*, *pussycat*, *bitch*, *doll*, *slut*, *cow* — to name just a few. Far fewer such pejorative terms exist for men.

## Marked and Unmarked Forms

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, 'What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening,' you answered, 'Man.' You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."

Muriel Rukeyser, *Myth*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> M. R. Schultz. 1975. "The Semantic Derogation of Woman," in B. Thorne and N. Henley, eds. *Language and Sex*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, pp. 66–67.

<sup>22</sup> *A Muriel Rukeyser Reader*. 1994. J. H. Levi, ed. New York: W. W. Norton, p. 252. Reprinted with permission of International Creative Management, Inc. Copyright © 1994 Muriel Rukeyser.

One striking fact about the asymmetry between male and female terms in many languages is that when there are male/female pairs, the male form for the most part is unmarked and the female term is created by adding a bound morpheme or by compounding. We have many such examples in English:

Male	Female
prince	princess
author	authoress
count	countess
actor	actress
host	hostess
poet	poetess
heir	heiress
hero	heroine
Paul	Pauline

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, if they are among this small group of female aristocrats.

Given these asymmetries, **folk etymologies** arise that misinterpret a number of non-sexist words. Folk etymology is the process, normally unconscious, whereby words or their origins are changed through nonscientific speculations or false analogies with other words. When we borrowed the French word *crevisse*, for example, it became *crayfish*. The English-speaking borrowers did not know that *-isse* was a feminine suffix. *Femide* is not the feminine form of *male*, which some people claim, but came into English from the Latin word *femina*, with the same morpheme *fe* that occurs in the Latin *fecundus* meaning "fertile" (originally derived from an Indo-European word meaning "to give suck to"). It entered English through the Old French word *femme* and its diminutive form *femelle*, "little woman."

Other male/female gender pairs have interesting meaning differences. Although a governor governs a state, a governess takes care of children; a mistress, in its most widely used meaning, is not a female master, nor is a majorette a woman major. We talk of "unwed mothers" but not "unwed fathers," of "career women" but not "career men," because there has been historically no stigma for a bachelor to father a child, and men are supposed to have careers. It is only recently that the term *househusband* has come into being, again reflecting changes in social customs.

Possibly as a protest against the reference to new and important ideas as *seminal* (from *semen*), Clare Booth Luce updated Ibsen's drama *A Doll's House* by having Nora tell her husband that she is pregnant "in the way only men are supposed to get pregnant." When he asks, "Men pregnant?" she replies, "With ideas. Pregnancies there (she taps her head) are masculine. And a very superior form of labor. Pregnancies here (she taps her stomach) are feminine — a very inferior form of labor."

Other linguistic asymmetries exist, such as the fact that most women continue to adopt their husbands' names in marriage. This name change can be traced back to early

legal practices, some of which are perpetuated currently. Thus we often refer to a woman as Mrs. Jack Fromkin, but seldom refer to a man as Mr. Vicki Fromkin, except in an insulting sense. This convention, however, is not true in other cultures.

We talk of Professor and Mrs. John Smith but seldom, if ever, of Mr. and Dr. Philippa Kerr. At a UCLA alumni association dinner, place cards designated where "Dr. Fromkin" and "Mrs. Fromkin" were to sit, although both individuals have doctoral degrees.

It is insulting to a woman to be called a *spinster* or an *old maid*, but it is not insulting to a man to be called a *bachelor*. There is nothing inherently pejorative about the word *spinster*. The connotations reflect the different views society has about an unmarried woman as opposed to an unmarried man. It is not the language that is sexist; it is society.

## The Generic "He"

*E, hesh, po, tey, co, jhe, ve, xe, he'er, thon, and na*

Words that have been suggested replacements for *he*.<sup>25</sup>

The unmarked, or male, nouns also serve as general terms, as do the male pronouns. *The brotherhood of man* includes women, but *sisterhood* does not include men.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all *men* are created equal" and "governments are instituted among *men* deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," he was not using *men* as a general term to include women. His use of the word *men* was precise at the time that women could not vote. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, masculine pronouns were not used as the generic terms; the various forms of *he* were used when referring to males, and of *she* when referring to females. The pronoun *they* was used to refer to people of either sex even if the referent was a singular noun, as shown by Lord Chesterfield's statement in 1759: "If a person is born of a gloomy temper . . . they cannot help it."

By the eighteenth century, grammarians (males to be sure) created the rule designating the male pronouns as the general term, and it wasn't until the nineteenth century that the rule was applied widely, after an act of Britain's Parliament in 1850 sanctioned its use. But this generic use of *he* was ignored. In 1879, women doctors were barred from membership in the all-male Massachusetts Medical Society on the basis that the bylaws of the organization referred to members by the pronoun *he*.

Changes in English are taking place that reflect the feminist movement and the growing awareness on the part of both men and women that language may reflect attitudes of society and reinforce stereotypes and bias. More and more, the word *people* is replacing *mankind*, *personnel* is used instead of *manpower*, *nurturing* instead of *mothering*, and *to operate* instead of *to man*. *Chair* or *moderator* is used instead of *chairman* (particularly by those who do not like the "clumsiness" of *chairperson*) and terms like *postal worker*, *firefighter*, and *public safety officer* or *police officer* are replacing *mailman*, *fireman*, and *policeman*.

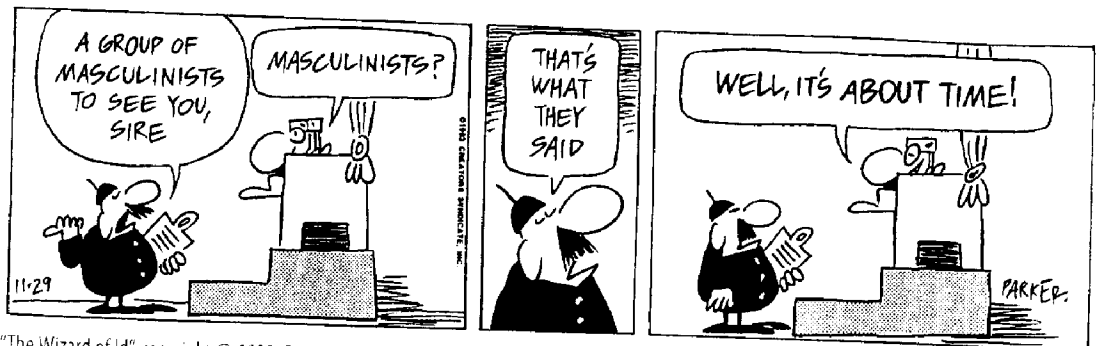
<sup>25</sup> Pinker, S. *The Language Instinct*. New York: HarperCollins, p. 46.

A. A. Milne summed up the difficulty in *The Christopher Robin Birthday Book* where he wrote:

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.

## Language and Gender

Beginning in 1973, when the first article specifically concerned with women and language was published in a major linguistics journal, an increasing number of scholars have been conducting research on language, gender, and sexism. Robin Lakoff's study suggested that women's insecurity due to sexism in society resulted in more "proper" use of the rules of SAE grammar than was found in the speech of men. Differences between male and female speech were investigated.<sup>24</sup>



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Variations in the dialects of men and women occur in America and in other countries. In Japanese, women may choose to speak a distinct dialect although they are fully aware of the standard dialect used by both men and women. It has been said that guide and helper dogs in Japan are trained in English, because the sex of the owner is not known in advance, and it is easier for an impaired person to use English than to train the dog in both language styles.

In the Muskogean language Koasati, spoken in Louisiana, words that end in an /s/ when spoken by men, end in /l/ or /n/ when used by women: for example, the word meaning "lift it" is *lakawhol* for women and *lakawhos* for men. Early explorers reported that the men and women of the Carib Indians used different dialects. In Chiquita, a Bolivian language, the grammar of male language includes a noun-class gender distinction, with names for males and supernatural beings morphologically marked in one way, and nouns referring to females marked in another.

One characteristic of female speech is the higher pitch used by women, due largely to shorter vocal tracts. Nevertheless, studies conducted by the phonetician Caroline

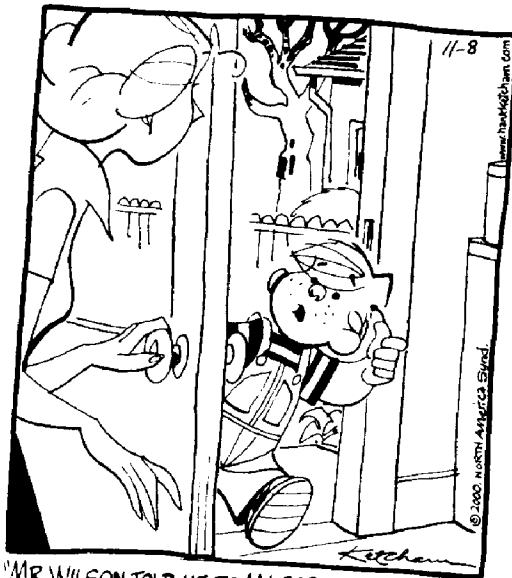
<sup>24</sup> R. Lakoff. 1973. "Language and Woman's Place," *Language in Society* 2:45-80.

Henton showed that the difference in pitch between male and female voices was, on the average, greater than could be accounted for by physiology alone, suggesting that some social factor must be involved during the acquisition period.

This chapter has stressed the fact that language itself is beyond good and evil, but its use may be one or the other. If we view women or Africans or Hispanics as inferior, then we are likely to regard their special speech characteristics as inferior. Furthermore, when society itself institutionalizes such attitudes, the language reflects it. When everyone in society is truly equal, and treated as such, there will be little concern for the asymmetries that exist in language.

## 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 either as a means of identifying with a special group, for fun as with the Elfish language from "Lord of the Rings," or to prevent others from knowing what is being said. When the aim is secrecy, a number of methods are used; immigrant parents sometimes use their native language when they do not want their children to understand what they are saying, or parents may spell out words. American slaves developed an elaborate code that could not be



"MR. WILSON TOLD ME TO AM-SCRAY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS, BUT I DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY HE SAID IT... SO I LEFT."

"Dennis the Menace®" used by permission of Hank Ketcham Enterprises and copyright © by North America Syndicate.

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.

One special language is Cockney rhyming slang. No one is completely sure of how it first arose. One view is that it began as a secret language among the criminals of the underworld in London in the mid-nineteenth century to confuse the “peelers,” that is, the police. Another view is that during the building of the London docks at the beginning of the century, the Irish immigrant workers invented rhyming slang to confuse the non-Irish workers. Still another view is that it was spread by street chanters who went from market to market in England telling tales, reporting the news, and reciting ballads.

The way to play this language game is to create a rhyme as a substitute for a specific word. Thus, for *table* the rhymed slang may be *Cain and Abel*; *missus* is called *cows and kisses*; *stairs* are *apples and pears*; *head* is *loaf of bread*, often shortened to *loaf* as in “use yer loaf.” Several cockney rhyming slang terms have crossed the ocean to America. *Bread* meaning *money* in American slang comes from cockney *bread and honey*; and *brass tacks* — those things that Americans love to get down to — is derived from the cockney rhyming slang for *facts*.

Other language games, such as Pig Latin (see the “Dennis the Menace” cartoon), are used for amusement by and of 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; Indian children learn a Bengali language game in which the syllables are reversed, as in pronouncing *bisri*, “ugly,” as *sribi*.

A language game based on writing disguises a forbidden word by adding strokes to alter letters. Thus F~~U~~C~~K~~ becomes ENOR by altering its four letters; C~~U~~N~~T~~ becomes OOMF, and now the innocent sounding nonsense words are codes for the vulgarities.

The Wilbiri, 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*.

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 its **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 dialectal characteristics occur in the speech of the region. A boundary line called an **isogloss** delineates each area.

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 dialect 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. **Code-switching** is when bilingual persons switch from one language to another, possibly within a single sentence. It reflects both grammars working simultaneously and does not represent a form of "broken" English or Spanish or whatever.

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 the people. In other cases, where traders, missionaries, or travelers need to communicate with people who speak a language unknown to them, a **pidgin** based on one language may develop, which is simplified lexically, phonologically, and syntactically. When a pidgin is widely used, and is learned by children as their first language, 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.

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 professional or trade groups.

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 itself cannot be obscene or clean; the views toward specific words or linguistic expressions reflect the attitudes 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 itself started as a euphemism for *lavatory*, which is now more acceptable than its replacement.

Just as the use of some words may reflect society's views toward sex or natural bodily functions or religious beliefs, so also some words may reflect racist, chauvinist, and sexist attitudes. Language itself is not racist or sexist but reflects the views of various sectors of a society. Such terms, however, may perpetuate and reinforce biased views, and be demeaning and insulting to those addressed. Popular movements and changes in the institutions of society may then be reflected in changes in the language.

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.

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## Exercises

- Each pair of words is pronounced as shown phonetically in at least one American English dialect. Write in phonetic transcription your pronunciation of each word that you pronounce differently.
 

a. horse	[hɔrs]	hoarse	[hors]
b. morning	[mɔrnɪŋ]	mourning	[mornɪŋ]
c. for	[fɔr]	four	[for]
d. ice	[ajs]	eyes	[ajz]