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language

A READER *for* WRITERS

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think was, *Where's the rest of the story*? What of the Ugandan people who have been working tirelessly to save child soldiers for a generation? What about the fact that Joseph Kony, at this time, is the least of their worries?

As an African in America, it's difficult for me to dismiss this type of activism as "well-meaning." Critics and supporters of the "movement" are debating whether or not it even matters if the people behind Stop Kony were 100 percent truthful when it came to factual information about the country they're trying to save. Of course it matters. It serves no one, least of all Ugandan people, to muddy the facts of such a complex situation just to manipulate people with charity propaganda.

15 All this reminds me of a story my father once told about an incident in our village of Ugep. When he was a little boy, a group of men from England had come bearing cameras. They were eager to capture the everyday comings and goings of our small village.

In late August, we celebrate an event known as The New Yam Festival. It's like a carnival in other parts of the world. Everyone in the village assumed that the English men were there to take photographs of this rich and beautiful aspect of our culture. But they weren't there for that at all. They were there to push their own agenda.

When they saw anyone who fit their idea of what Africa was, that's when their cameras switched on. They ignored the pageantry of the festival and zoomed in on a few young kids who were naked or dirty. These are the same images that go on to be used to represent all of Africa. Each village, each language, each country, each region gets clumped into this congealed pot of "poor Africa."

That's what Stop Kony is doing—perpetuating the notion that Africa is a place soft enough to land after a guilt trip. Furthering the myth that Africans are constantly in need of saving only serves to dehumanize its people. Nearly three decades after "We Are the World," I'm still fighting misconceptions about the continent.

For those of us who call a country in Africa home, constantly having to battle these misconceptions causes cultural fatigue. It's easier to change your accent and adopt an anglicized name than it is to constantly have your people and their lives invalidated. As happy as I am to live in America, I'm not here because the Nigeria of my birth was some horrid place. And that's true of most immigrants. We shouldn't have to choose between loving where we are and honoring where we came from.

Analyze

1. What idea about the intersection of language and identity does the term "unaccented existence" force you to consider?
2. Ikpi writes about her experiences as a Nigerian growing up in America. What effect did these experiences have on her?
3. What impression of Africa does Ikpi's essay leave on you? Why?

Explore

1. Often the images that the media presents of underdeveloped, non-Western nations are those of poverty and inhumanity. Why do you think this is so? Select a photograph that reflects such a nation and write about what you see in the image. What assumptions do you make about that nation? Why?
2. Africa is a vibrant and culturally diverse continent but, as Ikpi points out, Africans have to "battle misconceptions" about their land. In an essay, critically examine some of your beliefs about an African country by first describing those beliefs, explaining how you developed these beliefs, and finally consulting other sources (both journalistic and academic) to test the validity of those beliefs.
3. View the "KONY 2012" video and write an essay that describes and analyzes the message behind the film. Refer to external sources that shed light on the purpose of the video and its effect on the global community.

Daniel Hernandez
Spanglish Moves Into Mainstream

Daniel Hernandez is a news assistant in the Mexico City bureau of the *Los Angeles Times*, where he contributes to the *World Now* news blog and also to the print edition for news and arts. His interests lie in the fusion and mixing of all cultures, nations, and borders, as evident in much of his writing, including the following article, which originally appeared on *Boston.com* in January 2004. *Boston.com*, which is affiliated with the newspaper the *Boston*

Globe, was launched in October 1995 as a regional news and information site. In this article, Hernandez observes how Spanglish has entered the mainstream, arguing that there is more to the language beyond the mere corruption of English or Spanish words; it also involves complex code-switching. More important, it serves as a vehicle through which young, U.S.-born urban Hispanics are able to bridge two cultures: that of the largely Spanish-speaking world of their parents and the English-speaking world of their peers.

Consider the language you use with your parents or among your family, and the language you use among your friends and peers—in what ways do they differ?

On a muggy Sunday afternoon at the Duenas, mariachi music jumped from a boombox on the concrete in the driveway. The roasted smells of "carne asada" lingered over a folding picnic table, like the easy banter between cousins.

"Le robaron la troca con everything. Los tires, los rines," a visiting cousin said.

Translation: "They robbed the truck with everything. The tires, the rims."

"Quieres watermelon?" offered Francisco Duenas, a 26-year-old housing counselor, holding a jug filled with sweet water and watermelon bits.

"Tal vez tiene some of the little tierrita at the bottom."

Translation: "Want watermelon? It might have some of the little dirt at the bottom."

When the Duenas family gathers for weekend barbecues, there are no pauses between jokes and gossip, spoken in English and Spanish. They've been mixing the languages effortlessly, sometimes clumsily, for years, so much so that the back-and-forth is not even noticed.

Spanglish, the fluid vernacular that crosses between English and Spanish, has been a staple in Hispanic life in California since English-speaking settlers arrived in the 19th century. For much of that time, it has been dismissed and derided by language purists—"neither good, nor bad, but abominable," as Mexican writer Octavio Paz famously put it.

The criticism has done little to reduce the prevalence of Spanglish, which today is a bigger part of bilingual life than ever.

Now, it's rapidly moving from Hispanic neighborhoods into the mainstream. Spanglish is showing up in television and films, as writers use it to bring authenticity to their scripts and get racy language past network executives.

Marketers use it to sell everything from bank accounts to soft drinks. Hallmark now sells Spanglish greeting cards. McDonald's is rolling out Spanglish TV spots that will air on both Spanish- and English-language networks.

In academia, once a bastion of anti-Spanglish sentiment, the vernacular is studied in courses with names like "Spanish Phonetics" and "Crossing Borders." Amherst College professor Ilan Stavans published a Spanglish dictionary with hundreds of entries—from "gaseteria" (which means "gas station") to "chaqueta" (for "jacket," instead of the Spanish word "saco"). Stavans said new Spanglish words are created all the time, altering traditional notions of language purity that remained strong a generation ago.

Growing up, "I was told in school that you shouldn't mix the languages," said Stavans, whose college plans to hold the first Conference of Spanglish in April. "There used to be this approach that if you use a broken tongue, you have a broken tongue. It's not about broken tongues; it's about different tongues, and they are legitimate. I think you're going to see a lot more of that."

The rise of Spanglish says a lot about the demographic shifts in California and other states with large Hispanic populations.

Migration movements are traditionally accompanied by the mixing of the native language with the newly acquired one. Within a generation or two, the old-country tongue—whether Polish, Chinese, or Italian—usually recedes.

But unlike immigrants from Europe and Asia, Hispanics are separated from their cultural homeland, not by vast oceans, but by the border with Mexico and the 90 miles between Cuba and the Florida Keys.

The Hispanic immigrant population is constantly replenishing itself. Meanwhile, Spanish-language media, such as industry giants Telemundo and Univision, continue to grow, meaning the immigrants' original language remains a force in the community.

Today, Spanglish is especially popular among young urban Hispanics who are US-born—people like Francisco Duenas, who was raised in South Gate, Calif., lives near downtown Los Angeles, and works in an office in South Los Angeles. Spanglish, he said, allows him to bridge two cultures: the largely Spanish-speaking world of his parents and the English-language world of work and friends.

"I think this Spanglish, it's a way of saying, 'Look, I can do both,'" Duenas said. "And I think here in Los Angeles particularmente, it's not necessary to speak just Spanish or English. No puedes describir la vida aqui (you can't describe life here) without speaking both."

20 As Spanglish spreads, academics and marketers are finding that it's much more complicated than simply forming sentences with both Spanish and English words.

The most basic part of Spanglish is "code-switching," in which someone inserts or substitutes words from one language into another. For instance, Spanglish might sound like "Vamos a la store para comprar milk." ("Let's go to the store to buy milk.")

A more complicated form of Spanglish involves making up words, essentially switching languages within a word itself. It can happen when a word or phrase is translated literally, like "perro caliente" for "hot dog." In other instances, Spanglish is created when an English word is Hispanicized, such as "troca" or "troque" for "truck."

Just where the sudden popularity of code-switching will end is a matter of debate. Jim Boulet Jr., executive director of English First, a lobbying group opposed to bilingual education and which has railed against Spanglish, thinks the boom is a fleeting trend. He and other critics see Spanglish as a form of slang, not a new language.

"There's always been some form of that," he said. "At one point it was Yiddish, then the black urban slang, and now Spanglish is the new 'in' thing."

25 But while academics try to break down Spanglish to understand how it is used, others say it's a code so spontaneous that it's impossible to fully unravel.

It's "a state of mind," said San Diego cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz, whose nationally syndicated strip "La Cucaracha" includes code-switching. "It's the schizophrenia of trying to deal with two worlds in one."

First-generation Hispanics roughly between the ages of 14 and 28 represent the fastest-growing youth demographic, according to the US Census Bureau.

Analyze

1. How does Hernandez's introduction use description, dialogue, and narration to illustrate how Spanglish works? Is this an effective rhetorical strategy?
2. What does the phrase "broken tongue" mean to you? What are the implications of using the word "broken" when it comes to language use?
3. Do you think that Spanglish is a form of slang, or is it instead "a state of mind"? Support your ideas by looking at some of the examples from the essay.

Explore

1. Is Spanglish unique in the way it combines two languages, or are such linguistic innovations common among other immigrant groups as well? What examples can you think of?
2. Examine the role of Spanglish in the Hispanic community. What effects does it have on the individuals who use the language?
3. Code-switching is the subject of much recent research in linguistics. In a researched essay, define "code-switching" within a specific community and draw from at least three academic sources to explain how this community developed its own type of "code-switching."

Leticia Salais

Saying "Adios" to Spanglish

Leticia Salais, a contributor to *Newsweek* magazine, grew up in El Paso, Texas. Eventually she married and moved to Tuscon, where she felt a sense of comfort and freedom among her community of non–Spanish-speaking, non-Hispanic neighbors. In the following article, which first appeared in *Newsweek* in December 2007, Salais describes how she overcame a sense of denial of her heritage and language. Although she taught her first son to speak only English, she switched gears with her second son, speaking only Spanish with him while her husband spoke only English. In so doing, she instilled in her son the value of bilingualism.

Do you believe that by not learning your ancestral tongue you are denying your ancestral heritage?

Niños, vengan a comer. My 18-month-old son pops out from behind the couch and runs to his high chair. My 7-year-old has no idea what I just said. He yells out from the same hiding spot: "What did you say?" My older son does not suffer from hearing loss. He is simply not bilingual like his brother, and did not understand that I was telling him to come eat.

Growing up in the poorest neighborhoods of El Paso, Texas, I did everything I could to escape the poverty and the color of my skin. I ran around with kids from the west side of town who came from more-affluent families and usually didn't speak a word of Spanish. I spoke Spanish well enough, but I pretended not to understand it and would not speak a word of it. In school, I refused to speak Spanish even with my Hispanic friends. I wanted nothing to do with it. While they joined Chicano clubs, all I wanted to do was be in the English literacy club. Even at home, the only person to whom I spoke Spanish was my mom, and that's only because she wouldn't have understood me otherwise.

After I got married and moved to Tucson, Ariz., I thought I was in heaven. Though I was actually in the minority, I felt right at home with my Anglo neighbors. When I got pregnant with my first son, I decided that English would be his first language and, if I could help it, his only language. I never spoke a word of Spanish around him, and when his grandparents asked why he did not understand what they were saying, I made excuses. He understands but he's very shy. He understands the language but he refuses to speak it. In reality, I didn't want him to speak it at all.

In a land of opportunity, I soon realized I had made a big mistake. I was denying my son one of the greatest gifts I had to offer: the ability to be bilingual. I saw the need for interpreters on a daily basis in the health field where I worked. Even trips to the grocery store often turned into an opportunity to help someone who could not understand English or vice versa.

5 In the nursing home where I worked, I met a wonderful group of Spanish-speaking individuals, whom I bonded with right away. I longed to speak like they did, enunciating the words correctly as they rolled off their tongues. It sounded like music to me. I started watching Spanish telenovelas and listening to Spanish morning shows on the radio just to improve my vocabulary. I heard words that had never been uttered around me growing up in a border town where people spoke a mixture of Spanish and English. A co-worker from Peru had the most eloquent way of speaking in a language that I recognized as Spanish yet could not fully comprehend. Did I also cheat myself of being bilingual?

Today I can take any English word and, like magic, easily find its Spanish equivalent. I now live a life that is fully bilingual. I hunger for foreign movies from Spain and the interior of Mexico just to challenge myself by trying to guess what all the words mean. I even surprise my mom when she doesn't understand what I'm saying. I know she is proud that I no longer speak Spanglish, and I am no longer embarrassed to speak Spanish in public. I see it as a secret language my husband and I share when we don't want those around us to understand what we are saying. I quickly offer the use of my gift when I see someone struggling to speak English or to understand Spanish, and I quietly say a prayer of thanks that I am not in his or her shoes. I feel empowered and blessed that I can understand a conversation in another language and quickly translate it in my head.

My second son has benefited from my bilingual tongue. I speak only Spanish to him while my husband speaks only English; I am proud to say that his first language was Spanish. My 7-year-old, on the other hand, still has a way to go. I'm embarrassed that I foolishly kept my beautiful native language from him. I hope I have not done irreversible damage. A couple of years ago, I began speaking to him only in Spanish, but I had not yet heard him utter a complete sentence back.

Then, as if my prayers were answered, from behind the couch, I heard a tiny voice exclaim, *Ven, mira esto.* It was my older son instructing his little brother to come look at what he was doing. Maybe I won't be his first bilingual teacher, but it looks like he's already learning from another expert—his bilingual brother. Maybe it's not too late after all.

Analyze

1. Salais considers the ability to speak two or more languages "the greatest gift." Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Examine the author's experiences as she becomes a truly bilingual person. What other steps can one take to fully immerse oneself in another language?
3. What *might* be some of the personal and social benefits of being bilingual or multilingual?

Explore

1. If you are monolingual (i.e., you speak only one language), write about a time when you had to communicate in a new language. Describe how

you went about learning this language and how you felt about being bilingual.

2. Examine the argument that linguists make in favor of or against bilingualism by analyzing at least two scholarly articles from your library database. How convinced are you by the positions taken by the authors? Why?
3. Consider how educational policies related to bilingualism serve the individual student. What effect does it have on the learner? Refer to legitimate scholarly sources as you respond.

Felipe de Ortego y Gasca
Regarding Spanglish

Felipe de Ortego y Gasca, a professor at Western New Mexico University, is considered to be a principal scholar of the Chicano Renaissance. He teaches courses on the history and philosophy of education, Chicano literature, critical theory, and second-language acquisition. In the following essay, which appeared in April 2008 on *Newspaper Tree*, an online news and culture publication based in El Paso, Texas, Ortego responds to Letitia Salais's article "Saying 'Adios' to Spanglish." To Ortego, Spanglish is the product of "languages [that come] in contact with each other, enriching the discourse of expression."

As America becomes increasingly diverse, who benefits from upholding the notion of a "proper" language? Who benefits from challenging what's "proper"?

I was amused by Leticia Salais' piece on "Saying 'Adiós' to Spanglish" in *Newsweek* (December 17, 2007), in part because it reflects how little so many people know about language and its centrality in human intercourse and development. I was also saddened by the article because it tells us much about dysphoria (alienation) and its effects on self identity.

Leticia Salais caterwauls about the loss of the Spanish language her children have suffered. It turns out, however, that it's not their loss of the Spanish language she bemoans but her own loss of a Spanish she never learned because the *koine* of the Southwest (especially El Paso where she grew up) was Spanglish, that mixture of Spanish and English so prevalent in the borderlands between Mexico and the United States. She explains how she did everything she could to escape the poverty and the color of her skin, having grown up in the poorest neighborhoods of El Paso, Texas.

Poverty is everywhere, and economic circumstances can change that. But the color of one's skin is another story. Dysphorically, however, her escape was from her identity as a "Mexican." In the U.S.– Mexico borderlands, it doesn't matter which side of the border you're from. If you're a Mexican, you're a Mexican. Never mind that Mexican Americans are mexicans with a lower case "m" and Americans with a capital "A." This situation has prevailed for more than 160 years.

Hegemonically subject to the apodictic values of American society since 1848, far too many Mexican Americans have sought escape from the prison of the skin. Being mexican in the Southwest has been like being african (lower case "a") in the South. Salais' escape was to "run around with kids from the west side of town who came from more-affluent families."

Though she spoke Spanish "well enough" she "pretended not to understand Spanish and would not speak a word of it." In school she refused to speak Spanish even with her Chicano friends. While they joined Chicano clubs, all she wanted was to be in the English literacy club. At home, the only person she would speak Spanish with was her mother who knew no English. 5

She married and moved to Tucson, Ariz. where she was in heaven with her Anglo neighbors. When she got pregnant with her first son, she decided that English would be his first language and, if she could help it, his only language. But she saw the error of her decision—she realized the profitability of being bilingual "in a land of opportunity" that needed interpreters in so many of the professions and occupations. But her epiphany went beyond the realization of profitability. It took a turn towards the Spanish of propriety—good Spanish, the enunciation of words rolling correctly off one's tongue. None of that Spanglish.

Spanglish is actually code-switching from English to Spanish or vice-versa in utterances or sentences that may be syntactically English or Spanish,

what linguists call "intra-sentential alternation." For example: "Bueno bye" when saying "goodbye" or "Hasta later" for "Until later." Hyperbolically, the permutations are infinite. Spanglish works both ways—bi-directionally; and has a code for its intra-sententialism. In other words, code-switching occurs logically in its sentences. This means that Spanglish has developed a grammar of its own.

Along any boundary between two nations speaking different languages more code-switching occurs than one is aware of, not to mention the phenomenon of borrowed words. Most languages are studded with scads of borrowed words. Early on, English speakers in the Hispanic Southwest made English words out of such Spanish words as "calabozo" turning it into "calaboose." Or "juzgado" into "hoosegow." Or "mesteño" into "mustang" Or "la riata" into "lariat" incorporating the Spanish article "la" into the noun and prefacing it with the English article "the" so that, in effect, the utterance is "the the rope."

Along the contiguous border between Mexico and the United States, English and Spanish fertilize each other. Languages in contact zones are like consenting adults creating words full of pregnant meaning enriched like DNA by the power of their constituents. Both American and Mexican elitists decry the presence and use of Spanglish along the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, calling it bad English and bad Spanish—substandard and ungrammatical.

10 But Spanglish does not emerge just from the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. It emerges where there are communities of Spanish-speaking Hispanics in the United States from any Spanish-speaking country. Cubans in Miami speak Spanglish. Puerto Ricans in New York and Chicago speak Spanglish. Dominicans in DC speak Spanglish. Latinos everywhere in the United States speak Spanglish to varying degrees.

The linguistic phenomenon of Spanglish is part of the *efficient continuity* of language, that is, in their evolution, all languages tend toward more efficient articulations and expressions. This is what accounts for abbreviations in English like "What'll you have?" for "What will you have?" "I'll" for "I will." Or the abbreviations in text-messaging. In part, this *efficient continuity* explains how languages change. How Latin became French and Spanish and Italian and Portuguese and Romanian. Unfortunately, some English language purists pooh-pooh these notions, labeling instead the Spanglish phenomena as bad English and bad Spanish mixed together.

As a native speaker of Spanish and a professor of English for more than five decades, I speak Spanglish—and that's not a sign of bad English and

bad Spanish mixed together. It's what happens with languages in contact with each other, enriching the discourse of expression. That mixture does not impoverish either language. Linguistically we must come to terms with the phenomenon that is Spanglish before it becomes a *cause célèbre*.

In Spanglish I can say "*voy al show*" which means "I'm going to the movies." Using the word "show" doesn't mean I don't know the Spanish word "*cine*" or "*vistas*"—it means I have linguistic options of using either the English word "show" or the Spanish words "*cine*" or "*vistas*." This is the same process as using a French word, say, in an English expression, such as "*cause célèbre*." This is binary phenomena. A good example of binary phenomena is Ezra Pound who sprinkled his poetry with foreign words and expressions without bothering to explain them to the reader. Language is an amalgamation.

Even today, as when I was a child in San Antonio, Texas, one hears the judgment of the *populi* about Chicanos and their language. That *vox populi* contends that Chicanos don't speak English and they don't speak Spanish. The populi explain that what they speak instead is a bastardization of English and Spanish. Some commentators of that phenomenon have gone so far as to suggest that Chicanos are "alingual"—that is, they are without language.

The distinction between Spanglish and Tex-Mex (a corollary manifestation of languages in contact) is that the latter is a process of taking an English word and transforming it ostensibly into a Spanish word. The English word "truck," for example, is transformed into "troca" just as the English word "muffler" is transformed into the word "mofle." Both "troca" and "mofle" are not Spanish words per se, but part of the growing Spanglish lexicon which is well understood by "bilingual" residents along the U.S.–Mexico border. Interestingly, words like "troca" and "mofle" have migrated into Mexico and beyond and have become part of the extended lexicon of the borderlands such that in Mexico both words are used with aplomb. 15

Many if not all Chicanos use Hispanicized English words in their speech, not because they don't have a lexicon of standard English but because it's easier to use Hispanicized English words in their utterances. For example, in Spanish "to type" is "escribir a maquina." With a little bit of "linguistic tweaking" the English language word "type" becomes "taipear," the Hispanicized version, considerably shorter and more efficient than "escribir a maquina"—to write with a machine.

The same is true of the word "parquear"—for "to park" instead of the Spanish word "estacionar." Here it's not the length of the Spanish word that engenders preference for the creolized word "parquear" but popularity of the word "park." Preference for "parquear" is not because Chicanos don't know the Spanish word "estacionar." What is operational in that preference is the density of usage for the word "parquear." It has become "la moda"—the mode of parlance among Chicanos.

Creation of a "language" springing from two languages in contact is not uniquely a Chicano phenomenon. Creation of "blended nouns and verbs" occur everywhere languages "live" side by side or in proximity to each other. Because of the historical presence of American troops in Korea, Koreans have added the word "hom-reon" for "homerun" to their lexicon in the same way that Mexicans added the word "hon-ron" for "homerun" to their lexicon. For "hotcakes," Koreans say "hat-kei-i-keu" just as speakers of Spanglish use "keke" for "cake."

To their lexicon, Chicanos have added words like "wachate" for "watch yourself." Many Chicanos use the word "dematriation" as the English version of "desmadre" (riot) as Ricardo Sanchez, the Chicano poet, used the word. In Korea these kinds of hybrid words are called "Konglish" which also reflects words from Japanese.

20 In English we interject many Spanish words into our speech, words like enchilada, tacos, tamales, and tortillas as well as plaza, patio, and barbeque (from barbacoa). This is not bad English, just the way of the word. Our speech becomes more colorful and indicates just how languages syncretize. As a consequence of the American presence in Japan, the Japanese word for "rifle" has become "rifu." This is not bad Japanese, just an indication of how English has influenced Japanese.

In my Chaucer classes, I point out that Chaucer spoke more French than English, and we discuss how much French there is in the Canterbury Tales, especially in "The Wife of Bath's Tale." When we speak of Chaucer's language, we do not call it "Frenglish." Nor do we call Chaucer's use of "axe" for "ask" or "na moe" for "no more" bad English. English did not become English until after it was fertilized by 400 years of French. And Spanish did not become Spanish until after it was fertilized by 700 years of Arabic. In like fashion, Latin became French after consorting with the Gallic languages of Gaul; and in Iberia, Latin transmogrified into Spanish after consorting with the Iberian language of Hispania (Roman designation for Spain).

Spanglish is a battle over symbols. The symbolic values of English are changing and will continue to change in the cauldron of linguistic diversity. The English language of today is not the English language of 200 years ago. The speakers of English in 1807 would be hard pressed to understand today's English just as the speakers of English in the year 2207 will be hard pressed to understand today's English. [The language of the United States is nominally English, but it has evolved sufficiently different from the English of England that it merits calling it "the American language" as H.L. Mencken did.]

There is no accurate count of the number of Americans of Mexican descent in the United States, but the most consistent figures presently suggest a population of approximately 30 million, two-thirds of the 45 million American Hispanics, most of whom in their bilingual identity speak Spanglish as well as English and Spanish with varying degrees of fluency. Speakers of Spanglish represent a linguistic community.

It's important to bear in mind that characterizing the speech of that linguistic community as "Spanglish" is a pejoration reflecting attitudes of linguistic imperialism couched in terms of "good English" and "good Spanish." It's this linguistic imperialism that internalizes in Mexican Americans the notion that Spanglish is an inferior language. This internalization promotes dysphoria.

On a recent morning talk-show in El Paso, Texas, where the topic was 25
corruption in the El Paso County government, a Mexican American called in to the show, commenting that the corruption was because the county government had so many Mexicans. Adding that "as everybody knows all Mexicans are corrupt," to which the host objected strenuously. The point here is how dysphoria alienates Mexican Americans from themselves.

This is the dysphoria that drove Leticia Salais to reject Spanglish and the culture that spawned it believing that no good could come of being identified as part of that culture, and certainly no good in speaking its language since it is not "proper English" nor "proper Spanish." Thus, fleeing from one dysphoric situation, Salais has embraced an equally dysphoric solution, going from the frying pan into the fire, so to speak.

What is happening in Spanglish is what happened to Spanish as it emerged from Latin and as other languages emerged from Latin also. This phenomenon is not limited to romance languages. Though considered a

Germanic language, English is also a product of its Latin roots both as a province of Rome for 500 years and as a captive nation of the French speaking Normans for 400 years. Chaucer was part of the latter milieu, working at literature in the forge of an emerging language, much the way many Chicano writers have been working at the forge of the emerging languages of Chicano English and Chicano Spanish.

Current views about language, culture, and behavior are still influenced by historical and traditional concepts. In most instances, these concepts insufficiently explain the intricate relationship between language, culture, and behavior. Ergo the public opprobrium towards Spanglish. And also the current public opprobrium in the United States towards Spanish in general and at large, producing the backlash of English Only attitudes. Unfortunately these attitudes tend to reinforce existing stereotypes about Spanish-speaking American Hispanics and to perpetuate a variety of psycho-social propositions about Mexican Americans in particular. Historically, until 1970 one such proposition identified Spanish-speaking Mexican American children in the public schools of the Hispanic Southwest as retarded.

This was the state of Mexican American children in the American educational system as I pointed out in my cover story on "Montezuma's Children" (*The Center Magazine*, November/December, 1970). Forty years ago Mexican American children were considered retarded because they could not speak English. Though research since then has established that that psycho-social sentiment was engendered because they were "Mexicans."

There is no "proper Spanish" just as there is no "proper English." There is the Spanish and English of usage and convention. We tend to identify one brand of English as "standard English" and one brand of Spanish as "standard Spanish" in hopes of creating some kind of national cohesion via language. Unfortunately, however, language is not the glue of national unity. Across the globe there is internecine conflict between peoples who speak the same language. Respect for the individual regardless of the language he or she may speak and the way it's produced (accent) is the key to national unity. African Americans, for example, speak English (American English) yet have remained only marginally part of the national polity.

Leticia Salais has not achieved an epiphany. She is now ensconced in a linguistic ivory tower passing judgment on those who speak Spanglish. She prefers the mellifluous sounds of Peruvian Spanish, as she indicates in her

Newsweek piece, rather than the cacophonous sounds of Spanglish, failing to realize that in Peru the Spanish language has undergone a comparable evolution to the Spanish language in Mexico where the indigenous languages in contact with Spanish have influenced each other and produced a Spanish unique to Peru. A Spanish that is not Peninsular Spanish.

While I was an undergraduate at Pitt in Comparative Studies (languages and literatures), many students from Latin America would exclaim that their country had preserved *el mero castellano*—the pure or true Spanish. The most notorious in this regard were Argentines and Colombians, neither aware of how phonologically different their Spanish was from Peninsular Spanish. In Spain I heard many varieties of Spanish.

At the beginning of my linguistic studies at Pitt I imagined code-switching as a dual track in the brain where at appropriate places a synaptic spark enabled the switch from, say, Spanish to English or English to Spanish, much like switching trains on tracks. This was also when I accepted the proposition that one thought in specific languages. We now consider that "thinking in a language" involves coded electro-chemical impulses that are translated into aural signals at a voicing point. We don't think in languages but in electro-chemical codes. Consider that when we press the letter key for "R" on a computer keyboard, the letter "R" is not traveling from the keyboard to the computer screen but a coded form of the letter and transformed into print at an appropriate place in the transmission process: the monitor or the page.

I'm reminded here of how many times I've heard non-Spanish speakers in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands express a desire to learn Spanish, adding the caveat: not "kitchen Spanish," explaining that "kitchen Spanish" is the Spanish the maids use. They want to learn Castillian Spanish. Shades of the Mexican-Dixon Line! In the U.S.–Mexico borderlands the maids are almost always Mexican as are the gardeners and those who work at the jobs of last resort.

Linguistic truths give way to invidious fallacies and, before long, Mexican Americans are considered once more as lazy, unambitious, stupid and retarded because they fail to meet the linguistic standards of the English language.

Analyze

1. Why does Ortego feel compelled to respond to Leticia Salais's essay? Does he fully explain why he is both "amused" and "saddened" by her essay?

2. What is "efficient continuity"? Explain the meaning of the term by referring to some of Ortego's examples.
3. Ortego claims that "the English language of today is not the English language of 200 years ago." What kind of evidence is used to support this claim? Do you find the evidence convincing? Why?

Explore

1. Throughout his essay Ortego uses words ("hegemony" and "apodictic," among others) that might be unfamiliar to you. Write a response that reflects the effect of Ortego's diction on your understanding of his essay. Is he writing for the same audience as Leticia Salais?
2. What are the implications of privileging "proper Spanish" over Spanglish? What does this have to do with "linguistic imperialism?" Consider some of your preconceptions about how language *should* be used and how it is *actually* used. Refer to examples of patterns of word usage you've noticed in your community, on television, or on social networks.
3. Respond to Ortego's claim that "language is not the glue of national unity." Test this claim by considering the term "national unity." What does it mean and what does it have to do with what and how one speaks? Refer to published sources as you explore how different languages and dialects might affect those who use them.

Jaswinder Bolina
Writing Like a White Guy

Chicago-born poet Jaswinder Bolina teaches creative writing at Lesley University. He is the author of two collections of poetry: *Phantom Camera* (2013), which won the 2012 Green Rose Prize; and *Carrier Wave* (2007), which won the 2006 Colorado Prize for Poetry. "Writing Like a White Guy" appeared in November 2011 on the website of the Poetry Foundation, an independent literary foundation established in 1941 that publishes *Poetry* magazine and seeks to enhance the standing of poetry within American culture. In an interview with *Mandala Journal* (2011–2012) about "Writing Like a White Guy," Bolina noted that, "When I do manage to write anything about my background, it isn't because I mean to at first. It's because in the effort to write something new, the phrases and descriptions I'm working on start to take up orbit around the subject of race. It isn't intentional."

In what ways is it powerful to draw on your own identity and personal experience when writing about social or political issues?

My father says I should use a pseudonym. "They won't publish you if they see your name. They'll know you're not one of them. They'll know you're one of us." This has never occurred to me, at least not in a serious way. "No publisher in America's going to reject my poems because I have a foreign name," I reply. "Not in 2002." I argue, "These are educated people. My name won't be any impediment." Yet in spite of my faith in the egalitarian attitude of editors and the anonymity of book contests, I understand my father's angle on the issue.

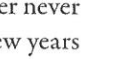
With his beard shaved and his hair shorn, his turban undone and left behind in Bolina Doaba, Punjab—the town whose name we take as our own—he lands at Heathrow in 1965, a brown boy of 18 become a Londoner. His circumstance then must seem at once exhilarating and also like drifting in a lifeboat: necessary, interminable. I imagine the English of the era sporting an especially muted and disdainful brand of racism toward my alien father, his brother and sister-in-law, toward his brother-in-law and sister, his nieces and nephews, and the other Indians they befriend on Nadine Street, Charlton, just east of Greenwich. The sense of exclusion arrives over every channel, dull and constant.

At least one realtor, a couple of bankers, and a few foremen must have a different attitude. One white supervisor at the industrial bakery my father labors in invites him home for dinner. The Brit wants to offer an introduction to his single daughters. He knows my father's a hard worker, a trait so commonly attributed to the immigrant it seems sometimes a nationality unto itself, and maybe the quietude of the nonnative speaker appeals to the man's sense of civility. As a result he finds my father humble, upstanding, his complexion a light beach sand indicative of a vigor exceeding that of the pale English suitors who come calling. In my imagination, my father's

embarrassed and placid demeanor, his awkward formality in that setting, is charming to the bashful, giggly daughters, and this impresses the supervisor even further. But nothing much comes of that evening. My father never visits again. He marries my mother, another Sikh Punjabi also, a few years later, but that event is evidence that one Englishman considered my father the man, not my father the "paki."

When he moves to hodgepodge Chicago nine years after arriving in England, he becomes another denizen of the immigrant nation, the huddled masses. He might be forgiven for thinking he will not be excluded here, but he isn't so naïve. America in 1974 is its own version of the UK's insular empire, though the nature of its exclusion is different, is what we call institutional. He knows that in America nobody should be rejected, not unabashedly and without some counterfeit of a reason, but all my father's nearly three decades as a machinist at the hydraulics plant near the airport teach him is that economies boom and economies bust, and if your name isn't "Bill" or "Earl" or "Frank Malone," you don't get promoted. You mind the machines. "Bills" and "Earls" supervise. "Frank" is the name the bosses go by, all of them hired after my dad but raised higher. So when my father suggests I use a pseudonym, he's only steadying my two-wheeler, only buying me a popsicle from the cart at Foster Avenue Beach. This is only an extension of covering my tuition, of paying my room and board.

5 At the time, I'm only a year or so into an MFA. I stop by the office of a friend, an older white poet in my department. Publication to me feels impossible then, and the friend means to be encouraging when he says, "With a name like Jaswinder Bolina, you could publish plenty of poems right now if you wrote about the first-generation, minority stuff. What I admire is that you don't write that kind of poetry." He's right. I don't write "that kind" of poetry. To him, this is upstanding, correct, what a poet ought to do. It's indicative of a vigor exceeding that of other minority poets come calling. It turns out I'm a hard worker too. I should be offended—if not for myself, then on behalf of writers who do take on the difficult subject of minority experience in their poetry—but I understand that my friend means no ill by it. To his mind, embracing my difference would open editorial inboxes, but knowing that I tend to eschew/exclude/deny "that kind" of subject in my poetry, he adds, "This'll make it harder for you." When, only a few months later, my father—who's never read my poems, whose fine but mostly functional knowledge of English makes the diction and syntax of my work difficult to follow, who doesn't know anything of the themes or subjects of my poetry—tells me to use another name, he's encouraging also. He means: Let them think you're a white guy. This will make it easier for you.



The one thing I least believe about race in America is that we can disregard it. I'm nowhere close to alone in this, but the person I encounter far more often than the racist—closeted or proud—is the one who believes race isn't an active factor in her thinking, isn't an influence on his interaction with the racial Other. Such blindness to race seems unlikely, but I suspect few of us entirely understand why it's so improbable. I'm not certain either, but I've been given some idea. At a panel discussion in 2004, a professor of political philosophy, Caribbean-born with a doctorate from the University of Toronto, explains that he never understood why the question in America is so often a question of race. A scholar of Marxist thinking, he says in nearly every other industrialized nation on Earth, the first question is a question of class, and accordingly class is the first conflict. He says it wasn't until he moved to the United States in the early '70s—about the same time my father arrived—that he intellectually and viscerally understood that America is a place where class historically coincides with race. This, he says, is the heaviest legacy of slavery and segregation.

To many immigrants, the professor and my father included, this conflation between success and skin color is a foreign one. In their native lands, where there exists a relative homogeneity in the racial makeup of the population or a pervasive mingling of races, the "minorities" of America are classed based on socioeconomic status derived from any number of factors, and race is rarely, if ever, principal in these. You can look down on anybody even though they share your skin color if you have land enough, wealth enough, caste and education enough. It's only arriving in England that the Indian—who might not even recognize the descriptor "Indian," preferring instead a regional or religious identity to a national one—realizes anyone resembling him is subject to the derision "coolie." It's only in America that such an immigrant discovers any brown-skinned body can have a "camel fucker" or a "sand nigger" hurled at him from a passing car—a bit of cognitive dissonance that's been directed at me on more than one occasion. The racially African but ethnically Other philosophy professor understands the oddness of this as well as anyone. He explains that in the United States, as anywhere, the first question remains a question of class, but the coincidence between class and color makes the first American social conflict a conflict

of race. As such, for the racial immigrant and his offspring, racial difference need be mitigated whenever possible, if only to lubricate the cogs of class mobility: nearer to whiteness, nearer to wealth.

If the racial Other aspires to equal footing on the socioeconomic playing field, he is tasked with forcing his way out of the categorical cul-de-sac that his name and appearance otherwise squeeze him into. We call the process by which he does this "assimilation." Though the Latin root here—shared with the other word "similar"—implies that the process is one of becoming absorbed or incorporated, it is a process that relies first on the negation of one identity in order to adopt another. In this sense, assimilation is a destructive rather than constructive process. It isn't a come-as-you-are proposition, a simple matter of being integrated into the American milieu because there exists a standing invitation to do so. Rather, assimilation first requires refuting assumptions the culture makes about the immigrant based on race, and in this sense assimilation requires the erasure of one's preexisting cultural identity even though that identity wasn't contingent upon race in the first place.

The first and perhaps essential step in assimilating into any culture is the successful adoption of the host country's language. What's unusual in America is that this is no different for the immigrant than for the native-born nonwhite. This is most obvious when I consider African Americans, whose language is variously described as "urban" (as in "of the slums of the inner city"), "street" (as in "of the gutter"), and "Ebonic" (as in "of ebony, of blackness"). These descriptors imply that whatever it is, black vernacular isn't English. Rather, it's "broken English," which is of course what we also call the English of the nonnative speaker. I'm tempted to categorize so-called "countrified" or "redneck" dialects similarly, except I remember that any number of recent U.S. presidents and presidential candidates capable in that vernacular are regarded as more down-to-earth and likable rather than less well-spoken or intelligent. It seems that such white dialect serves as evidence of charisma, charm, and folksiness rather than of ignorance.

10 In 2007, the eventual vice president campaigning in the primary election against the eventual president says, "I mean, you got the first mainstream African American who is *articulate* and bright and *clean* and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that's a storybook, man." The ensuing kerfuffle is almost entirely unsurprising. Though the white candidate believes he's merely describing the candidate of color and doing so with ample objectivity and perhaps even with generosity, the description implies that the black man's

appearance and eloquence constitute an exception to his blackness, which is a function of genetics, which only further suggests that the black candidate is an exception to his basic nature. The implication is that he is being praised for his approximate whiteness. Not shockingly, this very conflation of his eloquence with white racial identity leads pundits in another context to ask the obnoxious question, "But is he black enough?" The conundrum the candidate faces is that he need be an exceptional speaker and writer, but part of the "exceptional" here is the idea that he's an "exception" to his race. He has co-opted the language of whiteness. If he then neglects to take on the subject of race with that language, with the fierce urgency of now, he might further be accused of rejecting his own racial identity. Is he a candidate or a black candidate? If it's the former, he might not be "black enough." If it's the latter, he can't win.

In a country where class and race structurally overlap, what we call "standard" English reflexively becomes the English of whiteness rather than simply the English of the educated or privileged classes. When I adopt the language I'm taught in prep school, in university, and in graduate school, I'm adopting the English language, but in the States, that language is intrinsically associated with one race over any another. By contrast, in the England of history, the one prior to the more recent influx of immigrants from its imperial colonies, Oxford English is spoken by subjects as white as those who bandy about in Cockney. Adeptness of language usage isn't a function then of melanin but of socioeconomic location. Color isn't the question; class is. Unlike the Cockney of England or the dialects of India, none of which are contingent upon racial difference, alternate dialects in American English are inherently racialized. Assimilation in America then comes to mean the appropriation of a specific racial identity by way of language. The conundrum for the poet of color becomes no different than the one that faces the candidate of color: Am I a writer or a minority writer?

The day I'm born, my father engages in the American custom of handing out cigars to the "Bills" and "Earls" and "Franks" of the factory floor, even though he has never smoked in his life. Smoking is anathema to his Sikh Punjabi identity. Drinking, on the other hand, is most certainly not, and he gets gleefully and mercilessly drunk with his brothers at home. He boasts everywhere, "My son will be president." He believes it. Twenty-four years later, in 2002, when he counsels me to use a pseudonym, he knows I'm

already adept in the language. I've been educated in it, and in spite of all his diligence and intelligence, this is a key he's never been given. I talk like them. I write like them. I'm an agile agent in the empire so long as nobody grows wise. He no longer expects a presidency, but he sees no limit to potential success in my chosen field, except for the limits placed on me by my racial difference from the dominant culture. He doesn't consider the possibility that I write about race in my work, that I might want to embrace the subject, because he knows, like the candidate of black Kenyan and white Kansan bloodlines, I've been conditioned to resist making race the essential issue.

And it's true. The manner with which I avoid the subject of race in my first book is nearly dogmatic. Race is a subject I don't offer any attention to. To do so would seem only to underscore my Otherness, which would only result in the same sorts of requisite exclusions I experienced growing up in mostly white schools and neighborhoods. Assimilation in those circumstances isn't a choice so much political as it is necessary. Some remnant of a survival instinct kicks in, and one's best efforts are directed at joining rather than resisting the herd. To be racialized is to be marginalized. When another Asian kid joins the playground, we unwittingly vie to out-white each other. This tactic I learned from practice but also from my immigrant family. When your numbers are few, assimilation is the pragmatic gambit.

It's not something that we engage in without a queasy feeling. When my father suggests I Wite-Out my name, he's entirely aware that he's suggesting I relinquish the name he and my mother gave me. This isn't an easy thing, but growing up, I've never been kept from doing what the "American" kids do—though I'm born here and though my parents have long been citizens, "American" remains a descriptor my family uses to signify whiteness. Like the white kids, I join the Cub Scouts and play football at recess, I attend birthday parties at my American classmates' houses and go to junior high socials. In high school, after years of elementary school mockery, I attempt—not unlike the young Barry Obama—to anglicize my name, going by "Jason" instead, a stratagem that those who become my friends quickly reject after only a few weeks. I go to the homecoming dance. I go to the prom. I stay out past curfew and grow my hair long. I insist that my mother close all the bedroom doors when she cooks so my clothes don't reek of cumin and turmeric. I resist any suggestion that I study the sciences in order to prepare for a career in medicine or engineering. I never meet an Indian girl; there aren't any in the philosophy and English departments I'm

a member of anyway. My parents know I'm bereft of their culture. They must at times feel a lucid resentment, a sense of rejection and exclusion. Their son has become one of the English-speakers, as "Frank" or "Bill" to them as any American. But this, they know, is necessary. If the first generation is to succeed here, it's by resisting the ingrained cultural identity and mores of its immigrant forebears. If their son is to become president, my parents know it won't happen while he's wearing a turban. This is why they never keep me from engaging American culture, though it quickly comes to supplant their own. Assimilation is pragmatic, but pragmatism calls for concessions that compound and come to feel like a chronic ache.

It's because of the historical convergence of race and class in America 15
that we conflate the language of the educated, ruling classes with the language of a particular racial identity. If I decouple the two, as I might be able to do in another nation, I realize that what's being described isn't the language of whiteness so much as the language of privilege. When I say "privilege" here, I mean the condition of not needing to consider what others are forced to consider. The privilege of whiteness in America—particularly male, heteronormative whiteness—is the privilege to speak from a blank slate, to not need to address questions of race, gender, sexuality, or class except by choice, to not need to acknowledge wherefrom one speaks. It's the position of no position, the voice from nowhere or from everywhere. In this, it is Godlike, and if nothing else, that's saying something.

To the poet, though, the first question isn't one of class or color. The first question is a question of language. Poetry—as Stéphane Mallarmé famously tells the painter and hapless would-be poet Edgar Degas—is made of words, not ideas. However, to the poet of color or the female poet, to the gay or transgendered writer in America, and even to the white male writer born outside of socioeconomic privilege, a difficult question arises: "Whose language is it?" Where the history of academic and cultural institutions is so dominated by white men of means, "high" language necessarily comes to mean the language of whiteness and a largely wealthy, heteronormative maleness at that. The minority poet seeking entry into the academy and its canon finds that her language is deracialized/sexualized/gendered/classed at the outset. In trafficking in "high" English, writers other than educated, straight, white, male ones of privilege choose to become versed in a language that doesn't intrinsically or historically coincide with perceptions of their identities. It's true that minority poets are permitted to bring alternative vernaculars into our work. Poets from William Wordsworth in the

preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to Frank O'Hara in his "Personism: a manifesto" demand as much by insisting that poetry incorporate language nearer to conversational speech than anything overly elevated. Such calls for expansions of literary language in conjunction with continuing experiments by recent generations of American poets are transforming the canon for sure, but this leaves me and perhaps others like me in a slightly awkward position. I don't possess a vernacular English that's significantly different from that of plain old Midwestern English. As such, it seems I'm able to write from a perspective that doesn't address certain realities about myself, and this makes me queasy as anything. The voice in my head is annoyed with the voice in my writing. The voice in my head says I'm disregarding difference, and this feels like a denial of self, of reality, of a basic truth.

It isn't exactly intentional. It's a product of being privileged. In the 46 years since my father left Punjab, the 40 or so years since my mother left also, my parents clambered the socioeconomic ladder with a fair amount of middle-class success. We're not exactly wealthy, but I do wind up in prep school instead of the public high school, which only isolates me further from those with a shared racial identity. Later I attend university, where I'm permitted by my parents' successes to study the subjects I want to study rather than those that might guarantee future wealth. I don't need to become a doctor or a lawyer to support the clan. I get to major in philosophy and later attend graduate school in creative writing. Through all of this, though I experience occasional instances of bigotry while walking down streets or in bars, and though I study in programs where I'm often one of only two or three students of color, my racial identity is generally overlooked or disregarded by those around me. I've become so adept in the language and culture of the academy that on more than one occasion when I bring up the fact of my race, colleagues reply with some variation of "I don't think of you as a minority." Or, as a cousin who's known me since infancy jokes, "You're not a minority. You're just a white guy with a tan." What she means is that my assimilation is complete. But she can't be correct. Race is simply too essential to the American experience to ever be entirely overlooked. As such, I can't actually write like a white guy any more than I can revise my skin color. This, however, doesn't change the fact that if a reader were to encounter much of my work not knowing my name or having seen a photograph of me, she might not be faulted for incorrectly assigning the poems a white racial identity. This is a product of my language, which is a product of my education, which is a product of the socioeconomic privilege afforded by my parents' successes. The product of all those factors together is that the writing—this essay included—can't seem to help sounding *white*.

Recently, I was invited to give a few poetry readings as part of a literary festival taking place in a rural part of the country. I borrow my father's compact SUV and let its GPS guide me for a few days on the road. I spend afternoons and evenings reading poems with local and visiting writers in front of small audiences at community centers and public libraries. The audiences are largely made up of kind, white-haired, white-skinned locals enthusiastic to hear us read from and speak about our work, even when they've never heard of most of us. They at least appreciate poetry, a rarity I'm grateful for. During the introductions that preface each event, even the organizers who've invited me have difficulty getting my name right, and in one school library, I enunciate it over and over again. I say, "*Jas* as in the first part of *justice*; *win* as in the opposite of defeat; *der*, which rhymes with *err*, meaning to be mistaken." I say, "JasWINder," lilting the second syllable, and smile as about a dozen audience members mouth each syllable along with me until they feel they have it right. When they do, they grin broadly. After each event, I chat with them one or two at a time, and I do my best to reflect their warmth. They're complimentary about the work, and though I don't expect they're a demographic that'll especially like my poems—even when you write poems like a white guy, you might not be writing poems everyone will like—the compliments are earnest.

Still, in all this pleasantness, the awkward moment occurs more than once. It's some variation on a recurring question I get in town after town. The question usually comes up as a matter of small talk while I'm signing a book or shaking someone's hand. No one delivers it better, with so much beaming warmth and unwitting irony, than the woman who says she enjoyed my poems very much and follows this quickly with an admiring "You're so Americanized, what nationality are you?" She doesn't pick up on the oxymoron in her question. She doesn't hear the hint of tiredness in my reply. "I was born and raised in Chicago, but my parents are from northern India." Once more, I ought to be offended, but I'm not really. Hers is an expression of curiosity that's born of genuine interest rather than of sideshow spectacle. I'm the only nonwhite writer at the events I participate in. I'm the only one who gets this question. It makes me bristle, but I understand where it comes from.

20 After my brief tour is over, I make the 500-mile trip to suburban Chicago to return the Toyota to my parents. I eat dinner at home, and after, my father drops me back in the city. Invariably, the trip down the Kennedy Expressway toward the skyline makes him nostalgic for his early, underpaid days in small apartments on the North Side, his city long before it became my city. He tells a story or two, and we talk as usual about the news, politics, the latest way my uncle annoys him. He goes on a while before his attention returns to the moment, and he asks how my trip went. I tell him it went well. I say the audiences were kind and the drives were long. I say, out there, the country looks like a painting of itself. I don't mention what the woman asked, the recurring question echoed by others. "You're so Americanized, what nationality are you?" It won't matter that she asked it while eagerly shaking my hand. It won't matter that she asked while asking me also to sign a copy of my book for her. It won't matter that she offered her gratitude that I'd come all that way to read in her hamlet on the outskirts of America. Though she might have meant the opposite, he'll hear the question as the old door closing again. The doorway, then, is both welcome and departure, is border guard and border crossing, and though I'm not on the woman's side of it, I'm not entirely on my father's side either.

Perhaps for this reason, there's the continuing sense that I *ought* to write about race even as I resent that I need be troubled by the subject in the first place. After all, I should permit myself to be a poet first and a minority second, same as any male, white writer. But even as I attempt to ignore the issue altogether, I find myself thinking about it, and I realize now that this fact more than any other makes it so that I can't write like a white poet. Writing is as much the process of arriving at the point of composition as it is the act of composition itself. That my awareness of racial identity so often plays a part in my thinking about my writing makes it so that I can't engage in that writing without race being a live wire. Even one's evasions are born of one's fixations. More to the point, what appears to be an evasion might not be exactly that at all. John Ashbery doesn't make a subject matter of his sexuality, but this doesn't mean he's unable to inhabit the identity of a gay writer. Similarly, even though Mary Ruefle might not take on gender identity overtly in a given poem, it doesn't make that poem an adversary to the cause of feminism. I don't bring all this up to absolve myself exactly, though it's true I'm trying to figure out a way to alleviate a guilt I'm annoyed to feel in the first place. I imagine male, white poets will recognize this feeling. I bet any poet of conscience who doesn't actively write about sociopolitical

subjects knows this feeling, but the poet is trying to write the original thing, and that originality might not take up orbit around a more obvious facet of a poet's identity. When any of us doesn't take on such a subject in our writing, it might not be because we neglected to do so. Rather, it might be that the subject informed every bit of our deciding to write about something else.

More importantly, when it comes to writing about difficult issues of identity, especially those with far-reaching political and cultural implications, maybe the choice needn't be a dichotomous one. Maybe I don't need to choose between being the brown guy writing like a white guy or the brown guy writing about being Othered. Instead, maybe I need only be a brown guy writing out his study of language and the self—the same as the Paterson doctor, the Hartford insurance executive, the lesbian expat in Paris, the gay Jew from New Jersey, the male white poet teaching at the University of Houston, or the straight black female professor reading her poem at the American president's inauguration. Though "high" English might be born of a culture once dominated by straight white men of privilege, each of us wields our English in ways those men might not have imagined. This is okay. Language, like a hammer, belongs to whoever picks it up to build or demolish. Whether we take language in hand to deconstruct itself, to confess a real experience or an imagined one, or to meditate upon the relationship between the individual and the political, social, historical, or cosmological, ownership of our language need not be bound up with the history of that language. Whether I choose to pound on the crooked nail of race or gender, self or Other, whether I decide on some obscure subject while forgoing the other obvious one, when I write, the hammer belongs to me.

Analyze

1. Bolina's friend encourages him to write under his real name but his father recommends a pseudonym. What are some of the reasons for this?
2. What does the author mean when he says that "the coincidence of class and color" makes the "conflict of race" the biggest social conflict in the United States?
3. Explain why Bolina believes that in America, "standard" English is also considered to be the "English of whiteness." What does he mean?

Explore

1. Do you agree that assimilation naturally implies "the negation of one identity in order to adopt another"? Draw on personal or anecdotal experience as you write about what assimilation means to you and how it might or might not be different from the author's experience.
2. What exactly is a "language of privilege"? Who do you think uses such language and in what types of situations? Analyze an example from a song, dialogue from a movie, a television show, a political speech, or another popular source to show what particular features qualify it as "language of privilege."
3. Select a minority writer—a poet, a novelist, an essayist, a blogger—and do some research on the way he or she uses language. Is the writer's racial identity obvious in the writing itself? How so?

Forging Connections

1. Is it possible for language to erase stereotypical perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities? What sorts of linguistic changes would have to take place to ensure true equality for all? Be sure to draw from at least two selections in this chapter to support your argument.
2. As the numbers of language minorities continue to grow in our society, they are bound to create hybrid languages that do not follow the traditional rules of any one language. What new linguistic forms are currently developing in your community? What do they sound like and what effect do they have on its users? Refer to the concept of "code-switching" as defined by Daniel Hernandez and Felipe de Ortego y Gasca as you describe these new, hybrid forms of language.

Looking Further

1. The authors represented in Chapter 6 remind us of the need to respect—and even celebrate—linguistic diversity as an integral part of racial and cultural diversity. What are some of the steps that you can take to learn more about those in your community who speak Spanglish, Chinglish, or another hybrid language? Visit a campus or community cultural center and arrange an interview with someone who speaks a hybrid language, or practices "code-switching" as defined by Daniel Hernandez ("Spanglish Moves Into Mainstream") or Jin Zhao ("Oh My Lady Gaga! This Is So Gelievable!": Chinglish Entering Globish?," Chapter 9). Based on your research, is there more that your campus or community could do to celebrate its linguistic diversity?
2. As the selections in Chapter 10, "Endangered Languages," make clear, many of the world's smaller languages are languishing or disappearing altogether. Should speakers of these endangered languages adapt to more widespread languages (like English) and consider hybrid languages such as Chinglish and Spanglish as models? Or should they maintain the purity of these languages, even if the language risks extinction? Why or why not? Refer to the arguments set forth by some of the authors of this chapter as well as Chapter 10 as you write your essay.