

## Reading for cultural context

## Ganga or Gayle: Who Will Lead the Windies

By Tony Cozier

It is a fitting irony that Daren Ganga should have, in the space of a couple of weeks, suddenly returned as a credible candidate as West Indies skipper through his leadership in the shortest form of the game, even more so since the principal claimant to reclaiming the post is Chris Gayle. The two are closely linked in the ever changing story of the captaincy.

Ganga, based on his influence in bringing Trinidad and Tobago from near bottom to the top in regional cricket within a few years, was placed to lead West Indies 'A' teams on tour and in two Tests in England in 2007 when deputy to the injured Ramnaresh Sarwan before Gayle came into the picture.

Gayle was first elevated for the three ODIs on the same England tour only because of Sarwan's absence and Ganga's perceived inability as a limited-overs batsman. Even then, Gayle's nomination by the selectors was initially rejected by a West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) executive committee dubious of his suitability. In the end, under pressure, it had to make an embarrassing U-turn.

Now, on the eve of a tour of Australia for three Tests, the two Gs, so different in every way, are again the names most prominent among the public's short-list of who should be at the helm.

Gayle was the incumbent before he and all those players originally chosen for the series against Bangladesh walked out two days before

the first Test to press the West Indies Players Association (WIPA) case in its long-running disputes over contracts with the West Indies Cricket Board. Through a tenuous agreement that had to be brokered by Caricom politicians, the issues are now supposedly settled and the aggrieved players are all once more available for selection.

Gayle has asserted that he is ready to resume his role, stating that 'it is always an honour to captain the West Indies'.

Ganga has sensibly made no mention of such ambitions. He has simply once more come to the fore following his universally-praised leadership during Trinidad and Tobago's advance to Friday's final of the global Twenty20 Champions League final in India, paradoxically the kind of cricket that cost him the West Indies captaincy in the first place. He is now being promoted, inside and outside of Trinidad and Tobago, as the one needed to instill the same discipline, unity and pride shown by his team in India.

There can be no doubt that he has special qualities of leadership. As astute a judge as Ian Chappell alluded to it in the television commentary. Given the responsibility at whatever level, he will hardly shirk from it ...

**Source:** Cozier, Tony. "Ganga or Gayle: Who Will Lead the Windies," *The Trinidad and Tobago Express*. October 25, 2009.

### Questions to the text

- 1 What are the main points of the article?
- 2 Are there ideas or concepts that are difficult for you to understand?
- 3 Do you know the sport being played? The particular sporting terms?

- 4 Regardless of the sport or your knowledge of it, do you understand the main concern?
- 5 For whom is this article written?
- 6 Are there nuances that this particular audience would understand that you wouldn't?
- 7 Are there particular words or terms you don't understand? How could some of these have significance to the intended audience?
- 8 Do you think this is an important issue? Is this issue important to the audience? Why do you think so?
- 9 Did individual words or terms make it difficult for you to understand this article? What were these words? Were they all related to cricket?
- 10 Were there references in the article that you didn't understand? Were they related to cricket? A particular nation? A team? Particular people?
- 11 Now consider what aspects of your own background and language use may have made this article either relevant and interesting or perhaps confusing and foreign: nationality, personal interests or hobbies, race, gender, class etc.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which language and culture are interconnected. It is often difficult to isolate the study of language from social practice. After all, language is a discursive practice—it is our means of communicating with other people and so in many ways it can be viewed as a social act, an act that has the power to shape culture. Start with the above activity. When you have read the newspaper article, answer the questions that follow. It may be helpful to do this activity, like all of the activities in this book, with a partner or class group.

In your study of language there are times when you will be called upon to look at the minutiae of the text. In the classroom you may consider the ways in which sounds are made in speech, or the grammatical differences between different dialects of English. You may also be studying language from a broader perspective, considering the history of English or regional variations in the language. Some of your reading will directly address more social and cultural aspects of language, covering any number of issues from language acquisition in children to the uses of language in political campaigns. In addition to this specific study of language, or academic theories of language usage, you will also be looking at a wide variety of texts—including speeches, songs, newspaper articles, diaries, blogs, SMS chats, essays, photographs, posters, restaurant menus, and billboards. In your reading, you will be asked to do two jobs: to interrogate the opinions of others in relation to language and culture; and, by examining language in context, to come to your own conclusions about the way language is used.

While the Latin term most commonly used for humans is *homo sapiens*, we are also rightly known as *homo loquens*. We think, define ourselves, make ourselves known, and relate to others through language. It is important to consider how language is used in interesting and special ways in different types of texts. It will be important to consider individual words, terms, and patterns, as well as the use of language as a communicative, social act, aimed at a particular audience. The texts you will read in this



book, in class, along with those you encounter in everyday life, may require you to examine multiple viewpoints, or to consider viewpoints not represented. Communication acts are also about establishing power relationships. In this section you will work towards the following understandings in relation to language:

- Language changes in relationship to time and place**  
 Language is not only a broad and challenging subject to study but is an intriguing area of study partly because of its wide variation. In this section you will be asked to consider language that is very familiar to you and varieties of English that might be unfamiliar or even surprising. At any one given point in time, language can vary significantly from place to place and person to person, as it has throughout history and across different cultures.
- Language, culture and context determine the ways in which meaning is constructed in texts**  
 Language can be seen as the most basic tool for social interaction. It is not only a means for describing culture, but is part and parcel of the customs, traditions, and beliefs that we call culture. If something—from a poster for a circus, to a bottle of wine, to a short story—has meaning, it is because it is somehow related to a time, place, and language that we can at least partially understand.
- Meaning comes from complex interactions between text (or speech, or image), audience, and purpose**  
 Language is necessarily communicative. Even if you are alone in your room talking to yourself or sitting quietly composing a blog entry, you are communicating with yourself, thinking through language, modelling your ideas on something or someone else, or preparing to present them to your intended audience. Because, for most of us, language is an almost seamless connection between thought and our interaction with others, the words we use and the statements we make in speech and writing tell us about who we are or want to be, and can give us insight into the workings of our minds. By considering the ways in which language is both “sent” and “received” you will hone your abilities to interpret the wide variety of texts in your world.

The language and literature syllabus covers a broad range of topics related to cultural issues that involve language or are, in fact, created by language use. Your teacher may use topics suggested in the guide or design their topics around the specific interests of your class or group, or broader areas of investigation relevant to your cultural context. You will find that issues in one area overlap with issues in another. Is it possible, for example, to talk about identity as an area of investigation without considering ethnicity or gender? In addition, a specific area of investigation (as in environmental studies) may require you to analyze the way the news media has picked up on certain terms that reflect current sensitivities or topical issues.

For the purposes of this book, we have decided to give examples of ways in which you may approach a broad area of investigation. We have intentionally picked important, perhaps overarching, areas so that you may find that areas you have studied in other courses are reflected in the topics we have chosen. Along the way, we have also tried to make some suggestions about how your own study can be broadened. While we have presented in this section texts about particular subjects other

than language itself (as in the news article on cricket that you have just read), we have purposefully chosen passages that are also specifically about language issues and debates in society. From thinking about the ways in which language and knowledge are connected, and looking at issues that are closely connected to theory of knowledge, we will move to language and communities. Community takes us naturally to issues of identity, covered in the next section of readings.

## Language and knowledge

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.

Walt Whitman

When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the “human essence,” the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man.

Noam Chomsky

Among linguists, philosophers and biologists, the possession of language, perhaps more than any other attribute, distinguishes humans from other animals. In other words, we become “human” because we know language. Our ability to express emotions, maintain friendships, develop intellectual and social interests and even professional occupations are all rooted in language. But as our humanity is directly associated with language, it does beg the question of how, or how much, our knowledge of ourselves and the world around us is dependent upon or affected by language.

By now, you are very aware of some of the shortcomings of linguistic determinism. Our thoughts and perceptions are not determined only by the words or grammars that we know: we are not preprogrammed by whatever language we speak. Recent studies do, however, point toward a clear *influence* that language has on our cognition.

Advertisements point to “new and improved” products that powerfully affect our purchases of products even as we believe we are conscious and aware of such marketing tactics. Politicians refer to “welfare” for the people or “hand-outs” depending on what values they wish to convey. Even as students, you use a different language when producing a formal essay in your English class that may be inappropriate in a more personal discussion on the same topic (such as love) with friends, recognizing also that discussions on different kinds of knowledge and the relationship to lived experience require different kinds of language. All of these cases suggest a connection between language and knowledge, as well as social context. This idea is carried further in the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who argue that language is directly related to experience through metaphor. On the very first page of their book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson begin with the following:

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish ... We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and

### Key questions about language and cultural context

The following questions do not necessarily have an answer, but they may guide your approach to this section of the course:

- Is the ability to acquire language innate or learned?
- Are some languages more or less difficult to learn than other languages?
- Is class a more important factor in language variation than geography?
- Are changes in language directly related to the power of a group of language users?
- Can the biases towards particular language usage be unlearned?
- Does language shape culture or culture shape language?
- If language is an integral part of knowledge, can we really know and understand language?
- Can we understand texts that are written for different audiences in different times or cultures?
- Does the language of new media corrupt communication and culture?
- Should minority languages be saved from extinction?
- Should governments have a language policy for a particular nation?
- Does language define our identity?
- Do our beliefs influence our language use?



action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.

Language and knowledge, as a suggested topic in the language and literature course, also clearly introduces central concerns intrinsic to this course of study in the widest possible sense. Any knowledge one possesses that involves abstract thought relies on language. Thus, consciously or not, we are all engaged in producing, consuming and critiquing the world around us in language. Considerations about either knowledge or language are interwoven in symbiotic fashion requiring that any consideration of one demands questions of the other. The answer to questions such as “Who are you?” or “What do you do?” necessarily involve multiple social identities and each identity has consequences for the kind of language (or metaphors) we use. As David Crystal notes, “it is usually language which is the chief signal of both permanent and transient aspects of our social identity.” Beliefs, values, understandings and occupations are just some of the myriad identities and knowledges constructed in and around the language or languages that we use.

### Jargon and argot

In some cases, certain subsets of knowledge (e.g. law, science, politics, sports) overtly develop their own specialized language or terminology, sometimes called **jargon** or **argot**. Reasons for such specialization range from a desire to belong to a larger social or professional group to the need for clarity in communications. Jargon may be considered a type of slang or a type of specialized technical language, particular to a social group. For instance, while “spaced out,” “hang” or “lol” may be widespread and easily understood by people of a certain age group or social clique, this “teen argot” is viewed as slang while the arguably even less-penetrable “sjuzet,” “diegesis” and “metalepsis” are recognized as technically appropriate terms for professional literary theorists. However, whether viewed as slang or more formally accepted (proscriptive) language, even these two examples highlight the interrelationship between social and knowledge issues. In an extended version of the argument, two teenage friends emailing one another using the professional discourse of literary theory become, in fact, not just “teenage friends” but professional colleagues. Finally, although there is a tendency to draw clear distinctions between specialized terminologies (and social identities/knowledge), of course language is always shifting and jargon is subject to change: jargon terms pass into standard usage as they come to be embraced and understood by a larger segment of a population.

**Jargon** is the vocabulary peculiar to a particular profession or group.

**Argot** is a specialized vocabulary particular to a class or group, especially one devised for private communication.

For the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on language and knowledge issues in relationship to a few specific areas of specialist



knowledge (using the examples of medicine, law and sport), although it should be evident that these are just selective examples of topics that could be covered. You are encouraged to consider language and knowledge issues in your own life and throughout the course regardless of the specific topics covered here.

### Legal language

An interesting case study for the relation of language and knowledge is in the use of legal language. Legal language is meant to be clear statements of rules to regulate the behaviour of members of society and to protect the rights of those members. Legal language affects the way we conduct relationships, the way we come to understand our roles and the way we formulate our values because it quite literally puts these aspects in writing. Law is an act of language that has been given official status by a governmental system. Because laws are meant to be binding and regulatory, legal language attempts to be as clear and specific as possible. On the other hand, legal language is also always open to interpretation and debate because it can never be as clear, precise and concrete as it is intended to be. As David Crystal points out in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, legal language is unique in being required to respond to a variety of contradictory demands and functions:

Legal language is always being pulled in different directions. Its statements have to be so phrased that we can see their general applicability, yet be specific enough to apply to individual circumstances. They have to be stable enough to stand the test of time ... yet flexible enough to adapt to new social situations. Above all, they have to be expressed in such a way that people can be certain about the intention of the law respecting their rights and duties. No other variety of language has to carry such a responsibility.

Many factors of legal language highlight its complicated role in knowledge and understanding:

- **Legal language is conservative** Authority in law requires relying on legal statements that have already been accepted by governing bodies and tested in the courts. This may encourage the continued use of archaic language that no longer holds meaning for the general public. Because of this, it is not easy or often desirable to create or dismantle laws.
- **Legal language employs highly technical terminology** The use of specific legal terms facilitates communication within a very particular group but this can undermine accessibility to the general public that it is meant to serve.
- **Legal language often has strategic aims** Law can be used to further political, economic or social aims of powerful groups. While insurance laws, for example, may protect the consumer in difficult times, certain laws may be constructed to protect financial interests of insurance corporations. These aims can sometimes be in conflict. This can even be true in a courtroom where attorneys may use language to argue less about law and legal transgressions than creating sympathy or simply convincing a judge or a jury.
- **Legal language is inherently adversarial** Legal language attempts to solidify one particular side of an argument and therefore can always be argued against.

### Discussion Point

#### Different voices

An element that we sometimes look for in lively, engaging writing is voice. Voice can be described as the tone, attitude, or even personality of a writer revealing itself in a piece. Do you think voice is a function of personality or word choice or both? How easily can you change your voice and how desirable is this?

Consider the varieties of writing you produce in an average day or week. In what ways do you have a common voice across different language mediums (e.g. in the comparison between text messages and class essays, or emails you write to teachers in comparison to emails you send to friends)? In what ways is your voice different? In what ways can you recognize yourself as essentially *the same*?

What does the idea of common or separate voices suggest about who we are in the world, and how we adapt our language usage?

All of this is to say that the law affects what we know and understand. Legal language attempts to inscribe our beliefs and values but because it is *language*, law is never a completely firm grounding for knowledge and understanding.

Read the following sample disclaimer for the use of company email, an example that is probably similar to many other messages we ignore on a regular basis.

Communications on or through [company department] may be monitored or recorded to secure effective system operation and for other lawful purposes. Unless otherwise agreed expressly in writing by [company], this communication is to be treated as confidential and the information in it may not be used or disclosed except for the purpose for which it has been sent. If you have reason to believe that you are not the intended recipient of this communication, please contact the sender immediately. No employee or agent is authorized to conclude any binding agreement on behalf of [company] with another party by e-mail without express written confirmation by [company].

Employees of [company] are required not to make any defamatory statements and not to infringe or authorize any infringement of copyright or any other legal right by e-mail communications. Any such communication is contrary to organisational policy and outside the scope of the employment of the individual concerned. [Company] will not accept any liability in respect of such a communication, and the employee responsible will be personally liable for any damages or other liability arising.

Is this legal language meant to protect the individual? Protect the company? Does the language clarify rights and expectations? What specific penalties could result from transgressions?

## Activity

### Mother Goose hires an attorney

- 1 Take a nursery rhyme such as "Jack and Jill" or "Humpty Dumpty" and parody it by rewriting the account in legal language.
- 2 Take a simple issue and debate, working hard to attend to all present and future possibilities, to accurately reflect the standards of scientific research.
- 3 Find a sample of legal language from an historical document, disclaimer or brief. Does meaning become clearer or less clear in legal language? How?
- 4 Find a simple advertisement and recreate it as three different versions using the languages of sport, the law and a scientific laboratory. How do they compare?

### Scientific language

Similar to legal language, the language of medicine and science can be highly technical: facilitating understanding within a professional community but possibly confusing the general public. Considering the discussion of legal language above, look at the following examples from medicine and science and explore the ways in which the language highlights both precision and ambiguity. Like legal terminology, medical and scientific language can be unintentionally mystifying and adversarial.

## Advances in medicine

Read the following two articles concerned with medicine or medical advances. What are the intentions of the two texts? What does the language used tell you about the nature of the findings, the advances, or medicine in general?

### Text 1

Following is a text by an agency of the US government health department on the condition known as Fibromyalgia

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You are here: [Home](#) > [Health\\_Info](#) > [Fibromyalgia](#) > Fast Facts About Fibromyalgia

## Health Information

[Fibromyalgia](#)

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[Journal Articles](#)

### What Is Fibromyalgia?

#### Fast Facts: An Easy-to-Read Series of Publications for the Public

Fibromyalgia is a disorder that causes muscle pain and fatigue (feeling tired). People with fibromyalgia have “tender points” on the body. Tender points are specific places on the neck, shoulders, back, hips, arms, and legs. These points hurt when pressure is put on them.

People with fibromyalgia may also have other symptoms, such as:

- Trouble sleeping
- Morning stiffness
- Headaches
- Painful menstrual periods
- Tingling or numbness in hands and feet
- Problems with thinking and memory (sometimes called “fibro fog”).

#### What Causes Fibromyalgia?

The causes of fibromyalgia are unknown. There may be a number of factors involved. Fibromyalgia has been linked to:

- Stressful or traumatic events, such as car accidents
- Repetitive injuries
- Illness
- Certain diseases.

Fibromyalgia can also occur on its own.

Some scientists think that a gene or genes might be involved in fibromyalgia. The genes could make a person react strongly to things that other people would not find painful.

#### How Is Fibromyalgia Treated?

Fibromyalgia can be hard to treat. It's important to find a doctor who is familiar with the disorder and its treatment. Many family physicians, general internists, or rheumatologists can treat fibromyalgia. Rheumatologists are doctors who specialize in arthritis and other conditions that affect the joints or soft tissues.

Fibromyalgia treatment often requires a team approach. The team may include your doctor, a physical therapist, and possibly other health care providers. A pain or rheumatology clinic can be a good place to get treatment.

#### What Can I Do to Try to Feel Better?

There are many things you can do to feel better, including:

- Taking medicines as prescribed
- Eating well
- Getting enough sleep
- Making work changes if necessary.
- Exercising

**Source:** “Facts about Fibromyalgia,” NIAMS (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases), part of the National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services website. Updated 2009. [http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Fibromyalgia/fibromyalgia\\_ff.asp](http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Fibromyalgia/fibromyalgia_ff.asp). Accessed 04/03/2011.



**Text 2**

This is from a newspaper article published in the *International Herald Tribune*.

## Successes fuel hope for gene therapy resurgence

Not long ago, gene therapy seemed troubled by insurmountable difficulties.

After decades of hype and dashed hopes, many who once embraced the idea of correcting genetic disorders by giving people new genes all but gave up the idea.

But scientists say gene therapy may be on the edge of a resurgence. There were three recent, though small, successes ...

But given the history of gene therapy, some, like Mark Kay, a gene therapy researcher at Stanford, were careful to avoid promising too much.

The field was dealt a blow when the first gene therapy success, reported six years ago, turned out to be a problem. Eighteen of 20 children with a rare genetic disease were cured, but then three of the children developed leukemia and one died of it. Researchers and gene therapy companies became skittish.

"I like to be really cautious," Dr. Kay said. But now, he added, "there is a lot of reasonably cautious optimism."

The latest encouraging news arises from a paper published Friday in the journal *Science*. An international team of researchers is reporting the successful treatment of two children with adrenoleukodystrophy, or A.L.D., in which the fatty insulation of nerve cells degenerates. A result is progressive brain damage and death two to five years after diagnosis.

Scientists say they believe they avoided the cancer problem by using a different method to get genes into the children's DNA. Two years have gone by, and the children are doing well.

The children were not cured, but their disease was arrested. And gene therapy was as good as the standard treatment, a bone marrow transplant. In this case, the children could not have a transplant because they did not have marrow donors who were genetic matches.

In addition, a paper last month in the journal *Lancet* reported that a different method of gene therapy, which did not involve inserting a new gene in DNA, partly restored the sight of five children and seven adults with a rare congenital eye disease, Leber's congenital amaurosis. People with the disease have a mutated gene that prevents them from making a retina protein.

And a paper in *The New England Journal of Medicine* a year ago reported that 8 out of 10 patients with a rare immunological disorder were cured with gene therapy. The method was the same as the one that led to leukemia, and Dr. Cornetta and scientists were still studying why it did not cause cancer in those children. The paper in *Science* was accompanied by an editorial by Dr. Naldini titled, "A Comeback for Gene Therapy."

**Source:** "Successes fuel hope for gene therapy resurgence." *International Herald Tribune*. November 7–8, 2009.

### Comparing terminology

In comparing the two texts, both can be said to offer medical opinions presented in a furtive or guarded manner.

- Make a list of the different terms each text uses to describe uncertainty. What different rhetorical strategies can you detect in these two texts?
- What is the overall difference in the tone and effect of the language employed?

## Discussion Point

### The language of the science lab

*An experiment is only as good as the lab report that describes it.*

Anonymous

Science also employs a specific style of language. The specialized nomenclature and technical jargon is intended to provide objective information in a manner straightforward enough to be shared by a specific

community of people. In other words, while frequently written for an audience with some specialized knowledge, it is also intended to be understood by everyone within that audience.

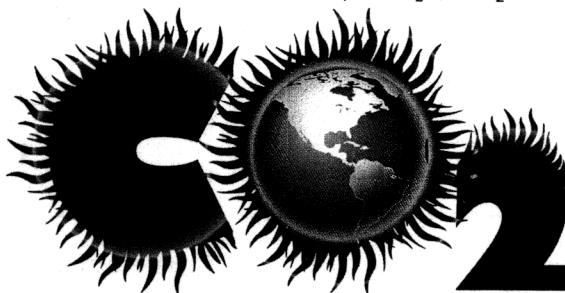
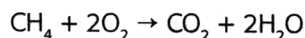
Consider science lab reports you have written in the past. In what ways do they rely on a unique argot and style? How do these traits enhance the experiment? Why or why not would this be inappropriate as a way of discussing a poem in English class?

## Discussion Point

### Language and the environment

The way we talk about an issue such as global warming affects the way we feel about the issue. Look at the chemical equation for the creation of carbon dioxide from methane and it's more creative rendering as an image.

Which version is more scientifically useful? Which one makes the stronger statement? Which version is most meaningful to you? Do either or both of these seem to meet the demands of scientific language? Why or why not?



## Language in sport

Quite clearly, we encounter the world beyond intellectual engagement. Sport, for instance, offers a physical and emotional way of knowing and understanding the world. While it may seem obvious to translate our thoughts about morality, values and rights into language (as we do in the realm of law), translating the action of sport into language may not be so easy. Consider, for instance, an interview with a tennis player just after winning a major tournament:

Interviewer	After double-faulting on double-match point, you seemed to take some speed off your second serve going for a lot more spin and just getting the ball in. Though a gamble, was that just to calm your nerves and get back into the point and the game?
Player	No ... I don't know.
Interviewer	But even though you did miss on the serve, you seemed like you were trying to slow the game and control the tempo.
Player	At that time, I wasn't thinking about the point or the moment. I just hit the ball, believing I could hit it like I have many times before.
Interviewer	But then you missed it. Surely you were worried about another double fault.
Player	Of course! After that, I hit the ball in. But when he was out of position for the backhand, I knew I had won.

The athlete here may have a difficult job explaining clearly the nearly mechanical movements that they are able to perform so well on a regular basis. The interviewer's job, however, is to seek to put into words a clear understanding of the often dramatic tensions that comprise at least part of the movement. The language of sport can incorporate contrasting challenges. On the one hand, it can attempt to almost scientifically describe the actions, strategies and expertise in the movements of a game. On the other hand, the good sports journalist understands that the language of sport may need to capture some of the emotional intensity behind and beyond the action.

The language of sport offers both precise analysis and emotional translation. In sports commentary, these poles are frequently recognized and institutionalized in the role of *analyst* and *colour commentator*. An analyst is responsible for technical description of movement and strategy. Most commonly, analysts are former coaches or athletes with substantial insight and knowledge. A colour commentator, on the other hand, is responsible for providing the human interest side. A colour commentator's job is to give background information, describe stories and create an emotional and distinctly human backdrop against which the actions are performed. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the language of sport, then, is that it combines these two often contradictory aims and intentions.

### The most decorated athlete

Consider the introduction to this article about Michael Phelps. Although it describes a highly emotional moment, how does the language rely on metaphors about competition or sport in general to convey effect?

Down in a basement corner of the Water Cube, everything was chaos. Michael Phelps had just won his eighth gold medal, in the 4 × 100 medley relay, and the world's press was sardined into the mixed zone, a low-ceilinged concrete gauntlet through which swimmers pass after a race. At best the mixed zone is an uninviting place; on this historic Sunday morning it was a mosh pit of outstretched hands holding cameras and voice recorders, of bodies jammed against barricades, a media Olympics in which the main sports were pushing and shoving. And the prize? A glimpse of Phelps after he exited the pool, still dripping water and fresh with victory. Hopefully he would stop for 30 seconds and say something, anything, to answer this question: How on earth did you pull this off?

The Australian relay swimmers came first, in full-relaxation mode, their suits pulled down from the shoulders. The Russians followed, and the great Japanese breastroker Kosuke Kitajima strolled by, and the crowd pressed forward as Phelps arrived in the narrow passage. Walking next to a woman holding a microphone, trailed by a television crew, he was six feet, four inches of relief, fatigue and quiet joy. His shoulders curled forward, rolling him into the question-mark posture that happens to swimmers when the back muscles take on a life of their own. Asked how it felt to be the first person to win eight gold medals in a single Olympic Games and the most decorated athlete of all time, he smiled and shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "So much emotion going through my head. ... I kinda just want to see my mom."

**Source:** Casey, Susan. "We Are All Witnesses." *Sports Illustrated*. August 25, 2008. pp. 68–73.

## How fast can she go?

Read the following article about the training and progress of a young runner.

# Desiree Davila Targeting Chicago and a Fast Time This Fall

Halfway into the 2009 world marathon championship in Berlin, Desiree Davila sat 42 seconds off the lead.

"You're not developing if you're racing two

marathons a year," Kevin Hanson says. "As a



### Questions to the text

- 1 What does the discussion of a technical and planned approach to training suggest about the nature of sport?
- 2 Is there language in this article that appeals to the emotion in sport?
- 3 Would you argue that the focus of this article is the athlete, the competition or the training?

### How language affects knowledge

This brief section on language and knowledge has focused on a couple of specific jargons. As will have become apparent, certain kinds of knowledge attempt to employ specific kinds of language for a variety of reasons. The reverse can also be true: specific kinds of language engender certain kinds of knowledge. Although there can never be a truly clear line distinguishing knowledge and language, it is important to recognize and consider how understanding, knowledge and intention affect language and how language affects understanding, knowledge and intention.

### Is truth social?

What might be the strengths and limitations of living in a world where “you” are the truth, and the origin of the production of knowledge.

Truth is Social: Humans have always wondered what makes something true. We have imagined truth to come from what the ancients wrote, what our ancestors believed, what repeatable experiments established.

But truth became social—truth as what we collectively think it is, with the most important truths being those about us. The idea of professionally produced, neutral, paid-for-information about situations not related to the self suffered. Blogs, YouTube, Facebook, crowd-sourcing, Wikipedia and Lonely-Girl15 filled the void.

Public and private happenings traded places: the former seemed to bore a new generation. Exhibitionism become a mainstream ethic. “Yes, You,” Time Magazine said when it made “you” the person of the year in the middle of the decade. “You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world.”

While the “Information Age” may involve information in many forms, there is clearly a link between language and what is argued above as the new knowledge of truth. What might be strengths and limitations to living in a world where one’s own production of language becomes truth/knowledge in the world?

**Source:** Giridharadas, Anand. “Reflections on the start of the 2000s.” *International Herald Tribune*. December 5–6, 2009.

### Questions to the text

- 1 What is exhibitionist about the way people behave on social networking sites?
- 2 Is the focus of attention on everything we do or say empowering or disempowering, or both?
- 3 What, as Giridharadas asks, might be the strengths and limitations of living in a world where one’s own production of language becomes truth/knowledge in the world?

### Activity

#### Researching sports coverage across different sporting cultures

Consider how language is used differently in different sports. For example, what might be the impact of referring to “all-out war” during a boxing match in comparison to “gentlemen’s singles” in tennis?

Find a newspaper article on a sport popular in your region. What terms, metaphors and connotations are reflected in the article? Grouping these together, what picture do they describe in terms of the participants, fans and role the particular sport plays in your community. Is it a popular or an elite sport? Where else is it played in the world?

### Discussion Point

#### The medium affects the message

In an era of multiple communication channels, it is not just the language used that can affect knowledge but possibly even the medium of transmission of that language. Does email, for instance, have the same effect as a certified legal document even if the content is the same?

Consider the variety of media in which you communicate and how they affect the language you use. What specific features are unique to differing media and how do they enhance the impact of communication? What effect would mixing communication protocols across different media have?

## Politically correct language

Language use can have a powerful social effect. For example, if we treat each other with respect by using more polite language in the classroom we might encourage greater tolerance and risk-taking in the exchange of ideas; the reverse approach would be to treat each other sarcastically and mock attempts to grow and change. To what degree this is true is a far more complex issue than presented here, but we have probably all had experience where politeness and rudeness have created very different environments. How hard did you try to make sure *not* to use an offensive or politically incorrect term when referring to other people?

The use of gender neutral or more politically correct language is directly related to the idea that the language we use may shape our understanding of, or relationship with, the world around us. If a book consistently uses “he” or “man” as a generalization for any person, the unintended effect is to exclude half of the reading public. The use of more precise or neutral language is an attempt to correct sexist, racist or potentially offensive terms being used. While some have argued that the movement to use correct language can seem a bit clinical, or lacking in expression, for the most part, these more politically correct terms have replaced outdated, inaccurate and old-fashioned conventions in language use. Often people use incorrect terminology without fully understanding the nature of the prejudice implied. The term Asian, for example, replaced the term “Oriental,” because the former implied geographical location only in relation to a European worldview. And, instead of using the word “man” as an archetype, “people” or “human beings” would do just as well if you want to refer to all of the human race (including women and children). You might, however, still have to negotiate the term “man” in reference to a universal human subject in a historical text, so it is important to understand the distinctions between current and past usage.

### Discussion Point

Think of terms or expressions you use that might seem offensive to others. Can you change your own attitude and relationship to other people by changing your language?

If you use offensive language when describing a particular group as a joke, is it surprising that some people might react to this critically? How can resisting the use of restricting labels and offensive terms show what you know about the world? If you think in a racist way, could you theoretically change your own view of the world by working to change your language?

## Language and community

Humans are social animals and we tend to gravitate towards people who share our interests. A group of people can not only share interests but also foster healthy debate about particular differences within the group. We all belong to a number of communities, both large and small, ranging from a nation to a neighborhood. But the types of communities are infinitely variable and can include sports teams, schools, churches, Internet groups, clubs, or organizations. Sometimes, in fact, we are members of a community without ever really contemplating our involvement, or signing up for it. A formal definition of community, in fact, may be a group of people that share the same customs, interests, laws or traditions, and language. Communities can be amorphous and hard to define—like the large informal community of people who love a particular type of music, or a sport. A community can be quite small, exclusive, and rules based—like the Canadian Warmblood Horse Breeding Association. Regardless of group profile, language plays an important role in the formation, nature, and dynamic activity of communities. Language,

as a way of knowing, is a means of describing or capturing what we know. A community is something that we as people create to *produce* knowledge, authority, and language.

Language, then, as a whole or as it is generally spoken, is itself a type of community. No matter where you are now or what your other languages may be, you are able to read this book because you are part of a large and diverse community of English speakers. Your language community may be even a bit more specific. If you are reading this book as a Portuguese speaker in Brazil who attends an English language school you belong to a community that may use English in different and interesting ways—you may be part of a community that ranges from Andorra to Zimbabwe that goes to school in one language and speaks another at home. You may be a student in Southern California, who despite not being a surfer, belongs to a particular, if stereotypical, language community of teenage “surf-ese.” You might live in London, but you could be a member of a large Polish community.

Besides being a community in and of itself, language is also one of the key elements that makes a community distinctive. A professional organization for surgeons would use a particular shared vocabulary—one that I wouldn’t understand—to communicate with its members. Of course, the language of a group is often distinctive because this group shares common interests, but beyond that, communities have the power to shape their language, not only through word choice but through the creation of new vocabulary. A surgeon knows what “brachytherapy” means. Without access to an encyclopedia, you may not know that it is a form of radiotherapy used in the treatment for some common forms of cancer, and is much in demand all over the world. From your knowledge of teen movies, however, you are more likely to be able to pick up that a “dude” can go from the beaches of California to a locker room in New England and eventually wind up in a Bollywood film. By considering different groupings of people—small and large, formal and informal—it is possible to see that language helps define community and that at the same time communities can influence language.

## Activity

### List your communities

How many communities do you belong to, either formally or informally? List as many as you can.

Do any of your communities use language in a particular way? Sometimes we are aware of vocabulary we may use with some groups but not with others. List some of the words (excluding, perhaps, the expletives) that you use in a particular community and not another.

### The English language

The development of the English language and its expansion throughout the world is a captivating story. From family origins in Indo-European languages to early Anglo-Saxon dialects, through the influence of Celtic and Roman borrowings, then on through its later manifestations into a broad range of regional variants, the development of the language has many twists, turns, nooks, and crannies that are interesting to investigate and compare.

Look at the following word chart and select from each row the term or the spelling that is most familiar to you. Which countries do you think they come from?

aeroplane	airplane	
railway	railroad	
petrol	gas	
tyre	tire	
centre	center	
lorry driver	trucker	truckie
move (to a new house)	move (to a new house)	shift
trainers	sneakers	takkies
ghost	ghost	duppy



### Analyzing your choice of words

If you chose the words in the left column of the chart you are most likely speak some version of British English. At the same time, you could be from a place where for some reason the English language was more heavily influenced by British English because of earlier imperialism or migration.

If you circled words from the middle column, you are probably speaking American English. American English is a variation of English that began its development almost as soon as the British colonized North America. Patterns of immigration, geography, and regional influences all play a role in developing the different strands of continental variants of English.

If you circled words in both the left and middle columns you may be speaking either Canadian or Australian English (if you circled "truckie" this would help to define you as Australian). Obviously, the English in these two countries branched directly from British English but in

both cases the languages were influenced by their own changing demographics, or make-up of peoples and cultures. In addition, the English in both countries is strongly influenced by American English through the pervasiveness of US culture and the sheer distance from the British Isles, and in the case of Canada in particular because of proximity to the border.

Finally, if you circled "shift" you are probably speaking Indian English, while if you chose "takkies" instead of "trainers" or "sneakers" you may be speaking a South African variation of English, while "duppy" would reveal your Caribbean origins. While the English in all of these areas was strongly influenced by British English, all three varieties developed separately. Currently, Indian English in particular is varied and robust because of the size of the English-speaking population, the size of the country, and its growing influence on English outside of the country's own borders through migration and the influence of its entertainment industry.

### Sociolinguistics and Corpus Linguistics

Sociolinguistics is a subfield of linguistics that studies language as it is used in a wide variety of social contexts. While some linguists are primarily concerned with language and the brain, the formation of sounds and the more "scientific" side of language study, sociolinguists may cross over into fields such as anthropology, sociology, education, or any field that concerns itself with the effect that language has on society or vice versa.

Corpus Linguistics is the study of a wide but delineated database of language as it is used for the purpose of studying language variety and structure in detail. An example of a corpus might be a massive collection of magazines published in the 1800s or, in a more contemporary example, the writing posted on a large number of blogs. Today, digital technology and the ease of both collecting and analyzing data from a corpus is accelerating both the particular insights of corpus linguistics and the possibilities for studying language in a variety of social contexts.

### Activity

#### Which English is that?

There are as many variations of English as there are countries in the English-speaking world, and varieties of English spoken elsewhere. Research the particularities of vocabulary, grammar, and accent in any of a number of countries from the islands of the Caribbean, to Ireland, to Kenya, or to New Zealand.

Membership in a community is, of course, a lot more complex than identifying with a list of words. Not only are individuals members of a number of different communities, but the groups themselves take on different identities and go in different directions based on the concerns or needs of their members. A broad language community is subject to pressures and conflicts just as a student club or a hockey team might be. The large communities of common-language speakers (often multilingual communities called nations), exist in a push and pull relationship. A nation changes the way a language is used while the use of a particular language changes the way a nation defines itself. Also, powerful groups have the ability to change language. Language, in turn, has the power to influence and change communities. Read the two newspaper editorials in the next activity and compare the attitudes the writers have about language, nation, and the changing nature of both.



## Language and nation

## Text 1

# A Language Without Limits

By Deena Kamel

Hinglish, Chinglish and Arabizi among variations as spoken English undergoes a revolution in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area]. That eve-teasing man thinks he's such a ranjha, but he's really a badmash. Chi-chi. In other words: "The man who sexually harasses women thinks he's such a Romeo, but he's really ill-mannered. Ick." That sentence, with its Hindi-English mix, might have folks at Merriam-Webster scratching their heads.

But all around the GTA, if you listen carefully, you'll hear English increasingly spiced with flavours from foreign languages. Hinglish, Chinglish and Arabizi are just a few of the variations. With its ethnic neighbourhoods, Toronto is the perfect city for a revolution in spoken English, historically an "absorbent language." The language we are hearing today will be very different from the English we will speak in future, as we borrow more words from dominant languages like Hindi or Chinese.

Academics call this mid-conversation and mid-sentence hybridization "code switching." It is disliked by some native English speakers, but not by language experts. "It is perfectly normal and linguistically fascinating, but people sometimes find it embarrassing," says Jack Chambers, professor of sociolinguistics at the University of Toronto. "They think it is a sign of incompetence when it is really a sign of resiliency and creativity."

Siham Ben, 27, a Moroccan medical student, came to Canada when she was 7. She switches between English and Arabic, producing a hybrid dubbed by Jordanian youth as Arabizi—a slang term for Arabic and "Inglizi" or "English" in Arabic.

"I don't feel it when I'm doing it," says the Toronto resident. "I don't pay attention to it." Ben, code-switching is a way of maintaining her identity. "I feel Moroccan first, then Canadian second. If I don't use Arabic first, I don't feel true to myself. It's a way of coping with life here."

Zina Alobaydi, 20, is a telecommunications sales representative living in Scarborough. "I feel my head is a dictionary," she says, as she thinks in Arabic and speaks in English. Alobaydi speaks the Iraqi dialect with her parents, as a sign of respect to them, but uses Arabizi with her friends. Alobaydi uses more Arabic, with its richness and depth, to express emotions that cannot be conveyed as well in English.

"Take the word 'bahr' for example," she says letting the word for 'sea' roll in her mouth. "It gives you the feeling of a big, unlimited space. It has an echo. It rhymes in your head and stays there." But she uses English when talking about culturally taboo subjects, such as dating, which are harder for her to convey in Arabic.

Hinglish, a lively hybrid spread quickly by the Internet and satellite channels, is the language of globalization. In 2004, David Crystal, a British linguist at the University of Wales, predicted that the world's 350 million Hinglish speakers may soon outnumber native English speakers in the United States and United Kingdom.

About eight years ago, Telus started to run Hinglish ads as part of a campaign to reach out to Canada's growing South Asian communities. The ads appeared in South Asian and ethnic print and broadcast media including Can-India News, Voice Weekly, and Hindi outlets abroad as well as Omni Television, according to Telus spokesperson A.J. Gratton. But with the popular mixing of Hindi and English, we may even be seeing Hinglish ads in Canadian mainstream media in future, says Telus marketing director Tracy Lim.

Pepsi ran a campaign in India with the slogan 'Yeh Dil Maange More!' (this heart wants more) and Coke followed with 'Life Ho To Aisi' (life should be this way).

A dictionary of the hybrid, *The Queen's Hinglish: How to speak Pukka*, was compiled in 2006 by Baljinder Mahal, a teacher from Derby in England.

Rena Helms-Park, an associate professor of linguistics at the University of Toronto, Scarborough, says code-switching creates a "rapport" that unifies the community. It can also be subversive. In post-colonial countries speakers are trying to reclaim English in their own way, to create a new national identity. "It's not a lesser English, it's one type of world English," Helms-Park says.

Indian writer Raja Rao writes: "We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or American."

English has always been a sponge language. Since it was written down in the year 700, it has adopted words from Norse, French and Latin, among others. English now has up to 700,000 words—more than almost any other language, according to Chambers. "That's a direct consequence of international scope, the fact that English has travelled so far around the world and mixed with so many other cultures and has absorbed influences from all those other cultures. It has been an amazingly tolerant language." Now there is an explosion in English vocabulary comparable to the development of its syntax in the 1400s and 1500s, when the printing press was invented.

"Some people feel threatened because the standard isn't adhered to across the board," Helms-Park says. "There are lots of purists out there." But times change, and with them, language. "In a sense it is a true reflection of the 21st century where immigration of groups, permanent crossing of national boundaries, is one of the constants of our lifestyle. The English language has a head start over lots of other languages because it already is so cosmopolitan in its constituents," Chambers says. Peering into the future, Helms-Park said written English will remain stable, but we will see a "melting pot of Englishes" in Canada rather than pockets of Hinglish or Chinglish. "What we end up with is more local colour."

Shoofhada, mezeiwan. LOOK AT THIS, IT'S NICE.

Ahlain, Keefak? HI, HOW ARE YOU?

Dim ah lei? HOW ARE YOU?

Source: Kamel, Deena. 2008. "A Language without Limits." *Toronto Star*. 19 August 2008.

## Text 2

# English grows into strange shapes when transplanted into foreign soil

By Ben Macintyre

LAST WEEK THE THINK-TANK DEMOS came up with a revolutionary new approach to the language —given the spread of hybrid forms of English, instead of insisting that new arrivals to this country learn standard English, it said, they should be taught such variations as Spanglish (Spanish-English), Hinglish (Hindi/Punjabi/Urdu-English) and Chinglish (Chinese-English).

Foisting a dollop of post-colonial guilt on to the mother tongue, the report argued that British attitudes to the language are “better suited to the days of the British Empire than the modern world”. Rather than regard English as a uniquely British invention to be defended, the British should see themselves as “just one of many shareholders in a global asset”.

I love the strange shapes into which English grows when transplanted into foreign soil, and the varieties of words that we import from the subspecies. “Chuddies”, the Hinglish for underpants, is only one of the most recent adoptions from India, following a long and honourable tradition of pyjamas, bungalows and kedgeriee.

“Long time no see”, now standard English, was once a literal translation from Chinese to English. But to leap from an appreciation of English in all its hybrid forms to the notion that these should be accorded equal status with standard English in England seems faintly perverse, and a misunderstanding of the organic way in which language evolves.

Latin provided the root for a multitude of languages. The same is undoubtedly true of English. But I don’t recall any Roman thinker suggesting that the bastardised and regionalised forms of the language spoken in such outposts as, say, Britain, should be taught in Roman schools.

Maintaining and preserving a standard form of English is not merely “Little Englishism”: employers and governments need to know that there is a correct way to use English, as do new learners. Demos suggests abandoning the Oxford English Dictionary as the repository of true English, and replacing it with a website to which anyone could contribute “English” words and definitions. Such a project would be fascinating, but not English: the outcome would be an informal lingua franca, a sprawling form of communication derived from English, but hardly a language.

English is spreading faster, and in a richer variety of ways, than any language in history. French schoolchildren refer, not just to “le weekend” and “le MacDo”, but use words of much more recent vintage: “le reality TV”, “le hoodie” and “le handsfree”.

Millions of Chinese use English as a second language, with the result that the largest proportion of new words being coined in everyday English are Chinese in origin. Some have been adopted into Mandarin: “drinktea”, meaning “closed” and derived from a Mandarin word, “torunbusiness”, meaning “open”. Where once such terms might have been absorbed slowly, the internet means that they circulate with astonishing speed. In the 1960s, there were some 250 million English speakers, mostly in the US, Britain and former colonies; today there are approximately the same number of Chinese with at least some grasp of English.

One of the most fertile and gorgeous English adaptations is Indian-English, a vigorous hybrid with its own syntax and vocabulary. English use is expanding more rapidly in India than at any time since its arrival on the subcontinent, fulfilling the novelist Raja Rao’s prediction that Indian-English is “a dialect which will one day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American”. There is a delightful internal rhythm to Indian-English. Rather than wash one’s hair, an Indian may take a “headbath”; sexual harassment is “eve-teasing”, a word at once less clinical and more suggestive than ours. In English we can only postpone an event; in India, we can “prepone” it, to bring it forward.

Lee Knapp, of Cambridge University’s English for Speakers of Other Languages examinations, argues that new forms of English (like the old) will have a gradual impact on the standard tongue. “The varieties (of English) are an expression of human communities,” he says. “It’s more likely they will be no different to the colloquial language of the UK, providing words and language use which will change the dictionaries over time.”

Applauding the adaptation of English in other countries should not mean abandoning a sense of where it comes from, or insisting that all forms are equal in this country. One cannot postpone the adoption of foreign forms of English—but there is no need to prepone it either.

If Chinglish must be taught in English schools, then teachers should also instruct pupils on playground patois, internet argot, Glasgow patter or any of the countless subsidiaries into which English has evolved. These are all interesting and valuable children of the mother tongue, but children nonetheless. To put that another way, there may be many shareholders in the English language, but there is only one CEO—Shakespeare.

**Source:** Macintyre, Ben. 2007. “English grows into strange shapes when transplanted into foreign soil.” *The Times*. March 24, 2007.

### For further discussion

Consider the following questions in relation to these articles. Write a brief summary of the situation in your country, in response to some of the main points discussed.

- 1 In what ways do the articles above celebrate language diversity?
- 2 Are the articles critical of language diversity? Language blending? Language change?
- 3 What are the possible reasons for people who “code switch” to feel self-conscious about using language combinations in public?
- 4 Why would linguists be interested in studying language change?
- 5 What are the possible reasons for wanting to slow or stop the change of language use in a particular country?
- 6 How should public education, in a given country, handle the instruction of the dominant native language? How should educators approach language variations?

### Activity

#### Do a language-use survey

On your own, with a partner, or with an entire class, carry out a language-use survey. What are the various languages spoken by students, parents, teachers, or others in your community? If English is widely spoken, what regional variations of English are spoken? What other variations of English are spoken and why? What is the reason for variations within a single community that you have chosen to survey?

#### Region and dialect

It is almost impossible to think of a monolithic, easily described community such as “nation” or “English language speakers” without starting to see the variations at work within these groups. Regional variation and social variation play a great role in creating communities and subcultures within larger states. Many cultural variations in language also serve to identify or unite—for good and bad—particular communities. As we have seen even in the articles about changes in the English language, difference in the form of dialect, accents, and word choice stand out and we tend to make judgments about these differences. Speakers of one dialect may look at another dialect from what many critics call the deficit model, or a way of viewing certain language variations as somehow inferior or deficient. From judging an accent it is a small step to broader prejudice.

The use of African American Vernacular English (or AAVE) in the United States is a good example of the complex role language plays in a culture. The United States still struggles with the legacy of slavery and the disadvantage among African American communities; this is reflected in the naming of the particular dialects spoken by many African Americans (which was recently more often referred to as Black Vernacular English). In the following activity, a series of short readings and questions, the existence and use of AAVE and issues concerning African Americans as a community and their relation to other communities, the importance of language in terms of community cohesion and identity, and the role of education are further discussed.

### Activity

#### Research into IB language policy

The IB has a “language policy” and takes a stance on issues ranging from support to students with “complex language profiles” and mother tongue entitlement.

Find documents related to IB language policy. How do these policies define the nature of the IB community? How could this policy itself be part of the debate over language, community, and power? Creative ideas for a written task could follow from your research.



## Dialect, identity, and power

Read the following passages, taking notes as you go along, and consider any guiding questions. Interrogate the texts, trying to uncover interesting features, ideas, and attitudes towards language and particular communities. At the same time note any interesting linguistic features or patterns.

### Text 1

In 1993, the African American writer Toni Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In its press release, the Nobel committee noted Morrison's narrative experimentation, the human spirit of her novels, and the range and quality of her work. The committee also made special mention that her work: "delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race."

Read the following passage from her novel *Beloved* in which Morrison, through the eyes of one of the main characters, Suggs, describes the singing—and language—of another character, Paul D.

And wouldn't you know he'd be a singing man.

*Little rice, little bean,  
No meat in between.  
Hard work ain't easy,  
Dry bread ain't greasy.*

He was us now and singing as he mended things he had broken the day before. Some old pieces of song he'd learned on the prison farm or in the War afterward. Nothing like what they sang at Sweet Home, where yearning fashioned every note.

The songs he knew from Georgia were flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding.

*Lay my head on the railroad line,  
Train come along, pacify my mind.  
If I had my weight in lime,  
I'd whip my captain till he went stone blind.  
Five-cent nickel,  
Ten-cent dime,  
Busting rocks is busting time.*

But they didn't fit, these songs. They were too loud, had too much power for the little house chores he was engaged in—resetting table legs; glazing.

He couldn't go back to "Storm upon the Waters" that they sang under the trees of Sweet Home, so he contented himself with mmmmmmmmm, throwing in a line if one occurred to him, and what occurred over and over was "Bare feet and chamomile sap,/Took off my shoes; took off my hat."

It was tempting to change the words (Gimme back my shoes; gimme back my hat), because he didn't believe he could live with a woman—any woman—for over two out of three months. That was about as long as he could abide in one place. ...

**Source:** Morrison, Toni. 1987. *Beloved*, New York: Vintage International. 2004. Kindle position 743–61.

### Questions to the text

- 1 How would you describe the language and diction of the narrator?
- 2 How is the implied diction or vocabulary of the character Paul D. conveyed?
- 3 Why does he sing one kind of song as opposed to another?

### Discussion Point

- What do you think it means to liberate language?
- How might language be enslaved, captured or restricted?
- Can a language be as enslaved as a person?



**Text 2**

In this excerpt from her 1993 Nobel Lecture, Toni Morrison describes the thoughts of a wise old woman trying to impart a lesson to young children while she contemplates language and the way it is "susceptible to death."

For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smitheryed to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental. Exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all uses and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

**Questions to the text**

- 1 Who is Morrison speaking to?
- 2 How would you describe her use of language and vocabulary?
- 3 Is the language academic? Literary? Inventive?
- 4 How would someone's language be stolen?

**Text 3**

DeAndre Cortez Way, better known by his stage name Soulja Boy Tell 'Em, or simply Soulja Boy, is an African American rapper and record producer. Following are the song lines from his 1998 single "Turn My Swag On."

**Turn My Swag On**

Soulja Boy tell 'em!  
 Hopped up out the bed,  
 Turn my swag on,  
 Took a look in the mirror said what's up  
 Yeah I'm getting money (oh) [x2]  
 Turn my swag on,  
 It's my turn, now turn it up  
 Yeah, yeah  
 I put my team on, and my theme song  
 Now it's time to turn it up  
 Yeah, yeah

I got a question why they hating on me,  
 I got a question why they hating on me  
 I ain't did nothing to 'em, but count this money  
 And put my team on, now my whole clic stunning  
 Boy what's up, yeah  
 Boy what's up, yeah  
  
 When I was 9 years old I put it in my head  
 That I'm gonna die for this gold  
 (Soulja Boy tell 'em)  
 Boy what's up, yeah  
 Hopped up out the bed  
 Turn my swag on  
 Took a look in the mirror said what's up  
 Yeah I'm gettin money (ooh) [x2]  
  
 I'm back again,  
 I know a lot of you all thought I wasn't coming back ...  
 Yeah, yeah  
 I had to prove them wrong,  
 Got back in the studio and came up with another hit  
 Yeah, yeah  
 I told the world my story, the world where I'm from  
 Souljaboy X L dot com, boy what's up  
 Yeah, yeah  
  
 Now everytime you see me spit  
 Every time you hear me rhyme  
 Everytime you see me in your state or town  
 Say what's up  
 Yeah, yeah  
  
 Hopped up out the bed  
 Turn my swag on  
 Took a look in the mirror said what's up  
 Yeah I'm gettin money (ooh) [x2]

**Source:** Soulja Boy Tell 'Em. 2008. *iSouljaBoyTellem*, ColliPark Music/Interscope Records.

### Questions to the text

- 1 How much of the vocabulary do you understand in this song?
- 2 Does this song belong to a particular community or to a variety of communities?
- 3 For whom is this song written or performed? To whom is this song marketed? By whom?
- 4 Does this song go against a dominant community, or along with it?

## Activity

### Image analysis: comparison and contrast

The novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was first published in 1852 to promote the anti-slavery movement. The book was extremely popular throughout the century. While the novel is at times credited with helping the effort to abolish slavery in the United States, the portrayal of the characters in the work itself and the plays and musicals based on the original, are often seen as promoting negative stereotypes of African Americans. How do the images on the poster juxtapose with the images on the quilt created by Harriet Powers, an African American artist, active in the same time period?

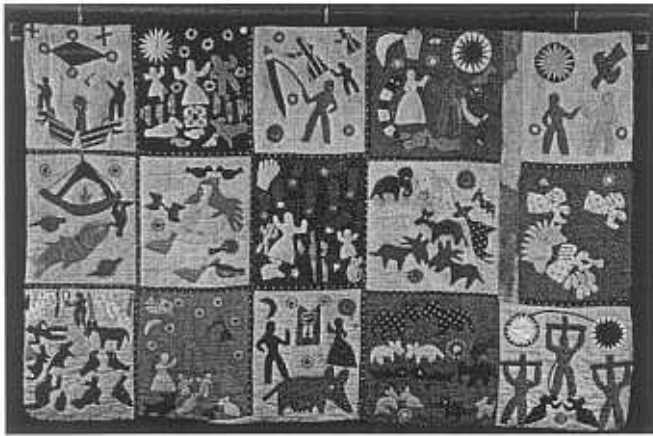
## Discussion Point

Many of the concerns raised in a discussion of regional variation, dialect, class, and the multiplicity of communities are related to the decisions we make about belonging.

- 1 How limited are we by the languages that we are able to speak?
- 2 How is our membership in a community tied to identity?
- 3 How is our identity tied to language?
- 4 How flexible is our identity? You will have the chance to explore some of these questions in the next section of this chapter.



A lithograph from 1899 promoting the stage show of Uncle Tom's Cabin.



A quilt by Harriet Powers, 1895-98.

### Class project

#### Study the English language and literature of a particular dialect or region

Explore the use of a particular regional variation or dialect of English and the issues that surround its use. Try to find the widest variety of texts that either use that particular dialect or comment upon it. Some further questions you might consider to support your research:

- How is this dialect primarily used? Is its use related to region? Race? Gender? Class? In what form is it usually expressed? Is its use primarily oral? Literary? Or, does it more frequently come across in popular culture, such as traditional folk songs?

Write an opinion piece on the value of these texts for further research and analysis.