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“Language is the highest and most amazing achievement of the symbolic human mind. The power it bestows is almost inestimable, for without it anything properly called ‘thought’ is impossible.”

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“Children’s errors are not just anecdotes for grandparents or reminders of long forgotten grammar lessons. They are windows into the workings of language, history and the human mind.”

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“Imagine a language that can’t be written. Hundreds of people speak it, but they have no way to read a newspaper or study a schoolbook in the language they use all day long . . . that is the situation of the quarter of a million or more deaf people in North America.”

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“There is hard evidence that the number of languages in the world is shrinking: of the roughly 6,500 languages now spoken, up to half are already endangered or on the brink of extinction.”

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Christine Cyr

With the death of Chief Marie Smith Jones, the only remaining native speaker of the Eyak language, a native Alaskan tongue that is part of the Athabaskan family of languages, the question arises—how do you go about learning a language that nobody speaks?

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“The beautiful truth burst upon my mind—I felt that there were invisible lines stretched between my spirit and the spirits of others.”

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Leonard Michaels

“Until I was five, I spoke only Yiddish. It did much to permanently qualify my thinking. Eventually I learned to speak English. . . . To some extent, my intuitions and my expression of thoughts remain basically Yiddish.”

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Christine Marín

“I learned the power of both the English and Spanish language on that [school] band trip.”

The Language of Silence 88*Maxine Hong Kingston*

“When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent. A dumbness—a shame—still cracks my voice in two. . . .”

■ Exploring the Language of Visuals: A Child's First Story 93**2 Writers on Writing 96****THE WRITING PROCESS 98****Writing for an Audience 98***Linda Flower*

“The goal of the writer is to create a momentary common ground between the reader and the writer.”

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“The very first thing I tell my new students on the first day of a workshop is that good writing is about telling the truth.”

Computers Invite a Tangled Web of Complications 106*P.J. O'Rourke*

“For reasons of high aesthetic principle, I do not write on a computer. Writing on a computer makes saving what's been written too easy. Pretentious lead sentences are kept, not tossed.”

Writing to Change the World 109*Mary Pipher*

“All writing is designed to change the world, at least a small part of the world, or in some small way, perhaps a change in a reader's mood or in his or her appreciation of a certain kind of beauty. Writing to improve the world can be assessed by the goals of its writers and/or by its effects on the world.”

■ Exploring the Language of Visuals: The Secret Lives of Fonts 112**On Good Writing 115***John Leo*

“The words of bureaucrats may twist tongues, but language on today's college campus can truly twist minds. Many prominent people, particularly academics, have invented new ways to torture the English language.”

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS 122**The Case for Short Words 122***Richard Lederer*

“When you speak and write, there is no law that says you have to use big words. Small words cast their clear light on big things—night and day, love and hate, war and peace, life and death.”

Saying Is Believing 125*Patricia T. O’Conner*

“The truth is that the reader is always right. Chances are, if something you write doesn’t get your point across, it’s probably not the reader’s fault—it’s yours.”

Clichés, Anyone? 130*James Isaacs*

How to make a commencement speech . . . the old-fashioned way.

Selection, Slanting, and Charged Language 132*Newman P. Birk and Genevieve B. Birk*

“It is important to remember that . . . before one person passes on knowledge to another, that knowledge has already been selected and shaped, intentionally or unintentionally, by the mind of the communicator.”

3 A World of Language 141**WHAT IS “AMERICAN” ENGLISH? 143****Do You Speak American? 143***Robert MacNeil*

“The controversies, issues, anxieties, and assumptions swirling around language today [can be] highly emotional and political. Why are black and white Americans speaking less and less like each other? Does Hispanic immigration threaten the English language? Is our exposure to national media wiping out regional differences and causing us all to speak the same? Is the language really in serious decline?”

Everyone Has an Accent but Me 154*John Esling*

“The fact is that everyone has an accent. Accent defines and communicates who we are . . . [it is] the map that listeners perceive through their ears rather than their eyes . . .”

Good English and Bad 159*Bill Bryson*

“Considerations of what makes for good English or bad English are to an uncomfortable large extent matters of prejudice and conditioning.”

Why the U.S. Needs an Official Language 168*Mauro E. Mujica*

“Parents around the world know that English is the global language and that their children need to learn it to succeed. English is the language of business, higher education, diplomacy, aviation, the Internet, science, popular music, entertainment, and international travel. All signs point to its continued acceptance across the planet.”

And May He Be Bilingual 173*Julia Ortiz Cofer*

“Having come to age within the boundaries of language exiles, and making only brief forays out in the vast and often frightening landscape called the mainstream, it’s easy for the newcomer to become ethnocentric.”

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE 178**Why a Global Language? 178***David Crystal*

“‘English is the global language.’ A headline of this kind must have appeared in a thousand newspapers and magazines in recent years. For what does it mean, exactly? Is it saying that everyone in the world speaks English? This is certainly not true. Is it saying, then, that every country in the world recognizes English as an official language? This is not true either. So what does it mean to say that a language is a global language?”

What Global Language? 187*Barbara Wallraff*

“English is not sweeping all before it, not even in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, ten years ago about one in seven people in this country spoke a language other than English at home—and since then the proportion of immigrants in the population has grown and grown.”

Not the Queen’s English 198*Carla Power*

“From Caracas to Karachi, parents keen for their children to achieve are forking over tuition for English-language schools. And governments from Tunisia to Turkey are pushing English, recognizing that along with computers and mass migration, the language is the turbine engine of globalization. As one 12-year-old self-taught English-speaker from China’s southwestern Sichuan province says, ‘If you can’t speak English, it’s like you’re deaf and dumb.’”

Lost in America 203*Douglas McGray*

“For all the changes globalization has brought to the average American kid’s cultural and commercial ecosystem, the average classroom has lagged far behind. As a result, young Americans represent something of a paradox: surrounded by foreign languages, cultures, and goods, they remain hopelessly uninformed, and misinformed, about the world beyond U.S. borders.”

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Is PowerPoint the Devil? 214

Julia Keller

“In less than a decade, [PowerPoint] has revolutionized the worlds of business, education, science and communications, swiftly becoming the standard for just about anybody who wants to explain just about anything to just about anybody else.”

Exploring the Language of Visuals: Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address— A PowerPoint Presentation 223

The Making of the *Gettysburg PowerPoint Presentation* 227

Peter Norvig

An Internet guru explains how Abe Lincoln might have used PowerPoint when delivering the visionary oratory at Gettysburg.

Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism 230

Christine Rosen

“On social networking Web sites like MySpace and Facebook, modern self-portraits feature background music, carefully manipulated photographs, stream-of-consciousness musings, and lists of our hobbies and friends. They are interactive, inviting viewers not merely to look at, but also to respond to, the life portrayed online. We create them to find friendship, love, and that ambiguous modern thing called connection.”

Virtually Trustworthy 237

Judith Donath

“Our impression of others in face-to-face interactions derives from multi-modal observations: We hear voices, see faces and gestures, and listen to each other’s words. Our online interactions are less sensory, dominated instead by text: We send e-mail, read discussion boards, and participate in text chats.”

VIRTUALLY SPEAKING 241

Texting 241

David Crystal

A distinguished linguist explains that that the language of texting is hardly as deviant as people think, and that texting actually makes young people better communicators, not worse. Could this much maligned form of communication be actually good for us?

“r u online?” The Evolving Lexicon of Wired Teens 247

Kris Axtman

“As in every age, teenagers today are adapting the English language to meet their needs for self-expression. This time, it’s happening online. . . . To some, it’s a creative twist on dialogue, and a new, harmless version of teen slang. But to anxious grammarians and harried teachers, it’s the linguistic ruin of ‘Generation IM.’”

Thx for the iView! I Wud ♥ 2 Work 4 U!! ;) 250*Sarah E. Needleman*

“After interviewing a college student in June, Tory Johnson thought she had found the qualified and enthusiastic intern she craved for her small recruiting firm. Then she received the candidate’s thank-you note, laced with words like “hiya” and “thanx,” along with three exclamation points and a smiley-face emoticon.”

The Other Side of E-Mail 253*Robert Kuttner*

“E-mail brings a kind of pseudo-urgency that demands instant response. It also creates false intimacies.”

Blogging in the Global Lunchroom 255*Geoffrey Nunberg*

“Taken as a whole, in fact, the blogging world sounds a lot less like a public meeting than the lunchtime chatter in a high-school cafeteria, complete with snarky comments about the kids at the tables across the room. (Bloggers didn’t invent the word snarky, but they’ve had a lot to do with turning it into the metrosexual equivalent of bitchy. On the Web, blogs account for more than three times as large a share of the total occurrences of snarky as of the occurrences of irony.)”

5 The Communication Gap: How We Speak to Each Other 260**HE SAYS, SHE SAYS 262****Women Talk Too Much 262***Janet Holmes*

“Despite the widespread belief that women talk more than men, most of the available evidence suggests just the opposite. Why is the reality so different from the myth?”

No Detail Is Too Small for Girls Answering a Simple Question 268*Tony Kornheiser*

“It is not that women lack the ability to prioritize information, it is that they don’t think life is as simple as men do.”

Sex Differences 270*Ronald Macaulay*

“More nonsense has been produced on the subject of sex differences than on any linguistic topic, with the possible exception of spelling.”

Right-Through Stare 276*Aletheia Plankiw*

“Esteban had been feeding Tim and me very good tequila on the house. At some point between our third and fourth drinks he began staring at me. It was neither a friendly nor a hostile stare, just cold and penetrating. It definitely was not a gaze. Esteban was staring *through* me at Tim. They were engaged in some sort of ritual, but it would be much later before I grasped its nature.”

“I’ll Explain It to You”: Lecturing and Listening 281*Deborah Tannen*

“One situation that frustrates many women is a conversation that has mysteriously turned into a lecture, with the man delivering the lecture to the woman, who has become an appreciative audience.”

**Exploring the Language of Visuals: Men Are from Belgium,
Women Are from New Brunswick 294****WHAT WE SAY AND HOW WE SAY IT 297****Nonverbal Behavior: Culture, Gender, and the Media 297***Teri Kwal Gamble and Michael W. Gamble*

“Throughout the world, people use nonverbal cues to facilitate self-expression. To a great extent, however, the culture of a people modifies their use of such cues. Even when different cultures use the same nonverbal cues, their members may not give the cues the same meaning.”

Small-Scale Communication 300*Jennifer Akin*

“Here is a scene with which we are all familiar: Alex says or does something that Bob interprets as an insult or an attack. Bob retaliates in words or action. Alex, having meant no harm in the first place, now sees Bob’s actions or words as an unprovoked attack. The situation can quickly escalate even though there was no real reason for a fight to begin in the first place. What has happened here is not a failure to communicate, but a failure to understand communication.”

The Like Virus 303*David Grambs*

“The L-word . . . The war against the usage—well, it wasn’t much of a war, alas—has been lost for some time, and we language-conscious losers are all trying to learn to live with the new, disjunctive babble.”

Some Friends and I Started Talking: Conversation and Social Change 311*Margaret J. Wheatley*

“True conversation is a timeless and reliable way for humans to think together. When we don’t talk to one another in a meaningful way, we become passive and allow others to tell us what to do.”

Speaking Personally 316*John G. Guinan*

A son recounts his relationship with his father, and the way fathers and sons communicate across generations.

6 The Language of Humor 320

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Joseph Boskin

“Just as it has been utilized as a weapon of insult and persecution, so, too, has humor been implemented as a device of subversion and protest.”

Laughter's New Profile 332

Lorraine Ali

“‘I went to the airport check-in counter,’ says Egyptian-American comic Ahmed Ahmed to a packed room at L.A.’s Comedy Store. ‘The lady behind the counter asked if I packed my bags myself. I said yes—and they arrested me.’”

Why Black Humor is So Black 334

Wil Haygood

“So much social pain . . . didn’t stop the curtain from opening. Hell, it opened wider. And there they stood, mike in hand, a ton of history on their backs, free to strangle it or uphold it or reinterpret it. History written by the jokesters. Just trying to get a laugh. Just holding on to freedom’s ticket.”

What's So Funny? 339

Regina Barreca

“Put three women together for more than three minutes and—whether or not they have ever met before—they will have exchanged vital details of their inner lives and started to laugh.”

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What Is a Cartoon? 345

Mort Gerberg

“Cartoons are the most powerful, the pithiest form of human communication, used everywhere and in many forms.”

■ Exploring the Language of Visuals: Editorial Cartoons 349

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Doug Marlette

“Kurt Vonnegut once compared the artist to the canary in the coal mine, a hypersensitive creature who alerts hardier life forms to toxic gases by kindly dropping dead. Given the steady demise of editorial cartoonists during the past several years, newspapers might begin to wonder about the quality of the air.”

Defiantly Incorrect: The Humor of John Callahan 357

Timothy Egan

“Anorexia, blindness, dysfunctional families and the death penalty—in a good week, all of those topics can find their way into the cartoons of John Callahan.”

Exploring the Language of Visuals: “Wheelchair Posse” 364

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With These Words, I Can Sell You Anything 369

William Lutz

“Advertisers use weasel words to appear to be making a claim for a product when in fact they are making no claim at all.”

The Language of Advertising 381

Charles A. O’Neill

“The language of advertising is a language of finely engineered, ruthlessly purposeful messages.”

Language Abuse 389

Herschell Gordon Lewis

“Today’s marketers throw terms the way they’d throw confetti . . . and with just about as much impact.”

How Tobacco Company “Anti-Smoking” Ads Appeal to Teens 397

Carrie McLaren

“*Tobacco is wacko if you’re a teen.* Unless the advertising geniuses behind the campaign are themselves whacko, surely they knew these ads wouldn’t work. The marketers are clearly less interested in curbing teen smoking than in appearing to do so.”

Exploring the Language of Visuals: Current Advertisements 401

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TV News: All the World in Pictures 412

Neil Postman and Steve Powers

“The fact that television news is principally made up of moving pictures prevents it from offering lengthy, coherent explanations of events.”

Are We Reaching Da Youth? 418*Danny Schechter*

Where is everyone going for their news? For some, it is the Internet, for others, the radio, and in the case of the growing and vitally important youth market, it is nowhere at all. Why is the younger generation tuning out?

Letting Words Fly 422*John McWhorter*

“In modern America premarital sex is considered ordinary. Men walk down the street showing the tops of their briefs and unmarried couples casually have and raise children. And we’re supposed to shudder when Bono lets fly with a cuss word?”

Is Bad Language Unacceptable on TV? 424*BBC Online*

“There’s a simple answer to all those complaining. If you don’t like it, then don’t watch it.”

Taking TV’s “War of Words” Too Literally 428*Deborah Tannen*

“Everywhere we turn, there is evidence that, in public discourse, we prize contentiousness and aggression more than cooperation and conciliation . . . everything is posed in terms of battles and duels, winners and losers, conflicts and disputes.”

8 Censorship and Free Speech 434**BIASED LANGUAGE AND HATE SPEECH 436****Hate Speech 436***Robin Tomach Lakoff*

“Language is the problem. We don’t know how to legislate hate speech, because we don’t really know how to classify any kind of speech, which we would have to do before we could safely legislate against it.”

Bias-Free Language: Some Guidelines 443*Rosalie Maggio*

“When we use stereotypes to talk about people (‘isn’t that just like a welfare mother/Indian/girl/old man’), our speech and writing will be inaccurate and unrealistic most of the time.”

The Word Police 453*Michiko Kakutani*

Ms. Maggio’s book supplies guidelines and alternatives to readers intent on using kinder, gentler language. But should *All the King’s Men* be retitled *All the Ruler’s People*?

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Gloria Naylor

"I was later to go home and ask the inevitable question that every black parent must face—"Mommy, what does "nigger" mean?"

A Note on "Ho" 463

Michael Geis

"A number of whites have brought up the apparent wide spread use of 'ho' in rap music and wonder how it is that it is okay for blacks to use 'ho' but not whites. No respectable black person would use 'ho' in a derogatory way to refer to a woman unless, perhaps, they were very, very angry, an emotional state in which unfortunate things are often said."

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Alan Charles Kors

"It is . . . almost inconceivable that anyone . . . could live on a college campus unaware of the repression, legal inequality, intrusions into private conscience, and malignant double standards that hold sway there."

Regulating Racist Speech on Campus 473

Charles R. Lawrence, III

Defending racist language in the name of liberty or free speech "has placed the bigot on the moral high ground and fanned the rising flames of racism."

There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too 477

Stanley Fish

"Free speech . . . is not an independent value but a political prize, and if that prize has been captured by a politics opposed to yours, it can no longer be invoked in ways that further your purposes, for it is now an obstacle to those purposes."

Hate Cannot Be Tolerated 489

Richard Delgado

"Hate speech is rarely an invitation to a conversation. More like a slap in the face, it reviles and silences. College counselors report that campuses where highly publicized incidents of hate speech have taken place show a decline in minority enrollment as students of color instead choose to attend schools where the environment is healthier."

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How to Detect Propaganda 496

Institute for Propaganda Analysis

“Without appeal to our emotions—to our fears and to our courage, to our selfishness and unselfishness, to our loves and to our hates—propagandists would influence few opinions and few actions.”

Doubts About Doublespeak 502

William Lutz

“Politicians, bureaucrats and merchants all are guilty of confusing the issue with language designed not to communicate.”

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Paul Freedman

Campaign ads can hold significant sway over Americans’ opinions of political candidates, serving as a “multivitamin” in an otherwise poor political diet.

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Jon Hooten

“While we have haphazardly sprinkled our language with war’s metaphors, is it possible that we have collectively forgotten how to think clearly about the literal phenomenon?”

The Semantics of Murder 524

Amir Taheri

If Islam forbids human sacrifice and suicide, why are suicide bombers so celebrated in many Muslim countries?

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Martin Luther King, Jr.

“I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.”

Ain't I a Woman? 537

Sojourner Truth

“[T]hat little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as man, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman. Where did your Christ come from?”

The Struggle for Human Rights 539

Eleanor Roosevelt

“We must not be confused about what freedom is. Basic human rights are simple and easily understood.”

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Nobel Lecture on Global Warming 549

Al Gore

“We, the human species, are confronting a planetary emergency—a threat to the survival of our civilization that is gathering ominous and destructive potential even as we gather here. But there is hopeful news as well: we have the ability to solve this crisis and avoid the worst—though not all—of its consequences, if we act boldly, decisively and quickly.”

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