



Exploring Language

Gary Goshgarian

8
th edition

EXPLORING LANGUAGE

EIGHTH EDITION

Edited by

Gary Goshgarian

Northeastern University



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For my sons, Nathan and David

PREFACE

The twentieth century draws to a close with a rumble of language controversies. Movies are under fire for celebrating dumb and dumber use of language; radio, for giving air to offensive shock-jock claims; the news media, for reporting stories in slanted prose; nighttime television, for increased use of profanity; and daytime talk shows, for rendering complex human issues in a sensational mixture of crude discourse and the latest psychobabble. Politicians are blasted for reducing intricate social issues to sound bites. Higher education is locked in First Amendment debates over what to do about incidents of hate speech—racist, sexist, and other forms of offensive discourse—on American campuses. The growing multiculturalism of American society has spawned a host of “politically correct” handbooks of nonbiased language, as well as a lot of critical backlash from conservatives. Crying cultural imperialism and racism, proponents of bilingual education go head-to-head with English-only advocates who are fighting to make English the official tongue of the nation. Advertisers have been threatened by the FCC over bloated claims for their products. And a sex-blind translation of the Bible has brought down some unholy thunder. To our north, Canada is still threatening to pull itself apart over French Quebec’s insistence on independence. The former Soviet Union continues to pull itself apart in Chechnya and the Caucasus where ethnocentric forces spill blood in part over the official tongue. And in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Burundi, political euphemisms have reached an obscene new low in “ethnic cleansing.”

But language news isn’t all negative or fraught with conflict. There have, in fact, been some positive language developments, especially at home. Since the early 1990s, verbal SAT scores have been on the rise—a trend that continues in spite of television, telephones, CDs, and video games. Also, on the music scene, there’s been a surprising outbreak of civility. Gangsta rap, which had plagued the airwaves with language as nasty as it wanted to be, was pronounced dead in 1996 by Dr. Dre and other original gangstas. Attesting to the vitality of American English and the inventiveness of its users, our language continues to grow. According to language historian Bill Bryson, some 20,000 new words are added to English each year. Since the last edition of this book (1995), wordsmiths have provided us with such items as *dream team*, *downsize*, *mosh pit*, *dumbing down*, and *deadbeat dad* which, for better or worse, may be with us well into the next century.

But all such language activity is not just about American English. It’s about American society; it’s about you and me. For language is both the prime medium of our culture and a mirror. How we express ourselves as individuals and as a society says much about us. Just as your own choice of language reflects something about your personal style, education, cultural background, origin, and

values, so does the language that makes up the media, the arts, and the political and social scenes. In short, language and culture are as inextricable as the dancer and the dance.

As did its seven forerunners, this eighth edition of *Exploring Language* brings together some very readable pieces that explore the various ways in which language and American society are interconnected. Once again, the book aims to lead students to a keener understanding of how language works: how it reconstructs the real world for us, how it can be used to lead, mislead, and manipulate us. Organized by nine major language areas, these selections demonstrate the subtle complexities and richness of English. They also invite students to debate current social and cultural issues that are inseparable from language. And they serve as models for composition, representing a diversity of expository techniques: narration, illustration, definition, process analysis, argumentation, persuasion, comparison, and contrast.

NEW TO THE EIGHTH EDITION

Over a third of the material in this book is new, most of it written since 1995. Pieces that were dated or no longer useful to students and instructors were dropped. And more essays by woman and minorities were included—in fact, these pieces comprise nearly 50 percent of the book.

New Topics, New Essays Each of the nine sections has been updated and strengthened. Many new topics were added to the already broad spectrum covered—essays that treat English in its present relation to race and ethnic identity, debates about “politically correct” bias-free language, political propaganda, bureaucratic doublespeak, advertising, journalism, insult humor, ethnic prejudice, obscenity, slang, and other matters that suggest language’s endless potential to be used and abused.

Literary Selections At the suggestion of instructors and their students, select poems and short fiction have been added to some of the chapters. Such selections demonstrate that language issues can be addressed in nonexpository contexts and that literature is ultimately about language. They also show how the dramatic forms can enhance understanding of complex issues. The inclusion of fiction and poetry broadens the cultural slant of the prose pieces and the students’ reactions to them. And working with these pieces can help students become better readers and writers through literature.

Case Studies Five of the nine chapters include a “Case Study” that focuses on a particular language issue, such as black English, freedom of speech, and sexism in the Bible. In each case are clustered two or more pieces that not only take opposing views of the particular issue but that broaden understanding of the topic.

Improved Apparatus Almost all of the apparatus in the book has been improved and updated with great effort to create penetrating thought and stimu-

lating assignments. Specifically, more research questions have been added to the Writing Assignments following each essay in the book.

Paired Essays and Debates A key feature of *Exploring Language* since its first edition was published in 1976 has been the debate format. Essays on emotional or controversial topics are paired with others presenting opposing views. Each of the nine chapters includes paired pieces. Some might be juxtaposed on a common obsession. For instance, in the first chapter, “Coming to Language,” three people from diverse backgrounds—Eudora Welty, Malcolm X, and Irish gypsy Johnny Connors—give inspiring accounts of their discovery of the written word. Some juxtaposed pieces might be indirect debates such as adman Charles O’Neill’s defense of his craft (“The Language of Advertising”) and William Lutz’s condemnation of the weasel language of advertisers (“With These Words I Can Sell You Anything”). Or, the debates might run head-on as in S. I. Hayakawa’s “Bilingualism in America: English Should Be the *Only* Language” and James Fallow’s “Viva Bilingualism,” which undercuts the English-only movement’s anxiety that our national tongue and unity is doomed. Or, Michiko Kakutani whose “The Word Police” directly attacks the efforts of Rosalie Maggio, author of “Bias-Free Language.” Or, former President Spiro Agnew who in “English Anyone?” takes on feminists such as Alleen Pace Nilsen (“Sexism in English: A 1990s Update”). Or, Jim Quinn who in “Simonspeak” takes on language guardian John Simon (“Why Good English Is Good for You”) for all his carping about slang, jargon and bad usage. Or, Nat Nentoff who goes head to head with Charles R. Lawrence over free speech versus censorship on college campuses.

Humor There is no reason why discussion of language should not be fun; nor is there any reason why writing models cannot be entertaining. Thus, many of the selections in the eighth edition of *Exploring Language* are funny. Nearly every section contains some humorous selections—pieces by well-known columnists George Will and Diane White; famous language watchers such as William Lutz, Bill Bryson, and Jim Quinn; and Pulitzer Award-winning humorists such as Dave Barry and Russell Baker. And, as always, there are more priceless headline gaffes in “Two-Headed Monsters.”

Apparatus This book is not just a collection of interesting thoughts on language. The selections offer varied and solid assistance to composition students trying to develop their own writing skills. First, the essays serve as models of many different expository techniques and patterns. Second, each selection is preceded by a headnote containing useful thematic and biographical information, as well as clues to writing strategies. Third, each essay is followed by a series of “user-friendly” review questions covering both topical and rhetorical strategies. These have been designed to help students think analytically about the content and forms of the essays. In addition, there are abundant suggestions for class discussion and writing assignments aimed at helping students relate particular essays to others in the book and to their own experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people behind the scenes are at the very least deserving of thanks and acknowledgment for their help with this eighth edition. It is impossible to thank all of them, but there are some for whose help I am particularly grateful. I would like, first, to thank those instructors who answered lengthy questionnaires on the effectiveness of the essays and supplied many helpful comments and suggestions: Cynthia Bates, University of California, Davis; Jim Karasiewicz, Maple Woods Community College; John Ruden, Sacramento City College; Otto Schlumpf, Clark College; Linda Toonan, University of Wisconsin, Green Bay.

A special thanks goes out to colleagues P. Carey Reid, Francis Blessington, Maryemma Graham, Anthony Triglio, and Stuart Peterfreund whose suggestions are reflected in this book. A very special thanks to Pamela B. Farrell for her continued support and to Jeanne Phoenix Laurel and Joyce Tesar of Niagara College, and Patricia Gantt of Dickinson University for their assistance in preparing some of the study apparatus.

I am also very grateful to Charles O'Neill for updating his essay, "The Language of Advertising," as he has in every edition since the first where it originally appeared. Thanks also to Edward S. Herman for updating his provocative criticism on the media in "Terrorism: Civilized and Barbaric"; and to Eugene R. August for revising his fine piece, "Real Men Don't: Anti-Male Bias in English."

To all the instructors and students who have used *Exploring Language* over the years I am enormously grateful.

To the people at Longman, especially my editor, Anne Smith, and development editor, Lynn Walterick, my warm appreciation.

Finally, to my wife Kathleen for her keen insight, her many hours of assistance, and her encouragement, once again—my loving appreciation.

GARY GOSHGARIAN

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