

## Analyze

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

## Explore

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

## Daniel Hernandez Spanglish Moves Into Mainstream

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 “Tal vez tiene some of the little tierrita at the bottom.”

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

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

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

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

10 Now, it’s rapidly moving from Hispanic neighborhoods into the mainstream. Spanglish is showing up in television and films, as writers use it to

bring authenticity to their scripts and get racy language past network executives.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Analyze

1. How does Hernandez’s introduction use description, dialogue, and narration to illustrate how Spanglish works? Is this an effective rhetorical strategy?

2. What does the phrase “broken tongue” mean to you? What are the implications of using the word “broken” when it comes to language use?
3. Do you think that Spanglish is a form of slang, or is it instead “a state of mind”? Support your ideas by looking at some of the examples from the essay.

### Explore

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

Leticia Salais

## Saying “Adios” to Spanglish

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

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