

## Episode 3

### *Tease*

**Michael:**

Whassup dawg?

**WINNIE:**

There's almost nothing more personal than how you express yourself

**NARRATOR:**

And in California everyone has something to say

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

That peak is jacked up Carmen What'dya mean fool?

**TEENAGE GIRL:**

Tiiiiight

**JAYK:**

You're gonna like give them props and it's gonna be something sick

**NARRATOR:**

In this last part of our journey, we'll travel the West Coast and explore an America that speaks many languages

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

My grandpop cooked dinner every night. How do you code switch this into mainstream American English?

**MAISO:**

My granpa cooks dinner every night

**NARRATOR:**

And computers that only want to be understood

**COMPUTER:**

Navigation menu

**ROBERT:**

Navigation address book.

**COMPUTER:**

Navigation menu

**ROBERT:**

Address book.

**COMPUTER:**

Pardon me?

**NARRATOR:**

It's like a

**STEVE:**

ripping

**SPEAKER:**

blasting good time

**NARRATOR:**

So ask yourself,

**ROBERT:**

Do I speak American? *Title Sequence:*

**WOMAN:**

Do you speak American?

**WOMAN:**

Do you like speak American?

**LOBSTERMAN:**

Do you speak American?

**WOMAN:**

Do you speak American? YOUTH:  
Do you speak American dog?

**COWGIRL:**

Do you speak American?

**JEFF FOXWORTHY:**

Do y'all speak American?

**WOMAN:**

Tu parles Americain?

**SOLDIERS:**

Do you speak American?

**STUDENTS:**

Do you speak American?

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

Estás hablando American?

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**NARRATOR:**

IN OUR PREVIOUS EPISODE OF DO YOU SPEAK AMERICAN WE LOOKED AT WHAT'S HAPPENING TO SOUTHERN SPEECH. THE FARTHER SOUTH AND WEST YOU GO, THE STRONGER THE INFLUENCE OF SPANISH

**ROBERT:**

Concerns about Spanish echo across the American Southwest, New Mexico, Arizona, Southern California, where we're going to continue this journey through American language. The first stop is L.A. It's a bit far to drive, so we're going to fly.

**NARRATOR:**

SPANISH IS JUST ONE OF THE LANGUAGE INFLUENCES WE'LL LOOK AT AS WE FOLLOW THE WEST COAST FROM LA TO SEATTLE AND ASK: DO YOU SPEAK AMERICAN?

**CONTROL BOOTH:**

Six, five, four, three, two, one. . .

**NARRATOR:**

IT'S CALLED MEX TO THE MAX AND IT'S HOSTED BY PATRICIA LOPEZ

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

That's right baby, I hope you guys are sitting down, cause we have a fun filled hour for you guys...[continues in Spanish]

**NARRATOR:**

PATRICIA, KNOWN AS "PATTY LONGLEGS", IS A FORMER FASHION MODEL WHO IS NOW A VJ, THAT'S VIDEO-JOCKEY, INTRODUCING LATINO MUSIC AND SALSA VIDEOS ON LOCAL TV.

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

My language is Spanglish. It's great because it's half English, half Spanish.

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

...and you know what time it is baby, it's time for the emails. Yes...

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

Alright let's get started with the first email here on this segment it says – Estaba cambiando los canales, y mire su programa y se me hizo muy interesante I would like to ask you you to play "El Gavilan" se llama Ricardo Cerda. Thanks and Good Luck... Love ya always

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

that came from Angel.

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

We have all these Latin people that are coming over –to the States, and I mean we're everywhere. And we might not feel comfortable speaking English – they should catch onto it. And we are, you know we are putting it out there for them.

**ROBERT:**

Why should they catch onto it?

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

Because it's, it's gonna be the second language of the States. Everyone speaks English. So they say, but you have a lot of Latino's that are coming over that, you know that don't speak it. My father is seventy two years old and doesn't speak it. Because you know that you, you can get by – not speaking it here in the States.

**ROBERT:**

That's terrific thank you.

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

Yeah. Thank you, thank you. Beso.

**PATRICIA LOPEZ:**

Oh no I made him blush. Ha, ha, ha!

**ROBERT:**

Ah well I blush easily.

**Patricia:**

Alright, because right now we're gonna go to Los Tucanes... cantando con su tema, "La Chica Sexy"

**NARRATOR:**

SPANGLISH ISN'T THE ONLY SPANISH-ENGLISH HYBRID. CARMEN FOUGHT IS A LINGUIST WHO'S BEEN STUDYING CHICANO, ONE OF THE STREET-TALKS OF LATINO LOS ANGELES.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Chicano English is a dialect of English, that grew out of the historical contact between English and Spanish in the Southwest. You get articles written that say on the way to mastery of English. And that's not true at all. Chicano English is now its own vibrant, thriving dialect. It's not going anywhere. Luckily for me, because I do research on Chicano English.

**NARRATOR:**

CARMEN DID MUCH OF HER RESEARCH WITH HIGH SCHOOL KIDS WITH SPANISH SPEAKING PARENTS. SHE TOOK US TO A NEARBY PARK TO HEAR SOME CHICANO ENGLISH.

**NARRATOR:**

WANTING THE KIDS TO BE AS RELAXED AS POSSIBLE, WE'VE PUT RADIO MIKES ON TWO OF THEM. AND THEN WE, AND THE CAMERA, ARE KEEPING WELL BACK.

**MICHAEL:**

So wassup dawg? What's cracking dawg? What's crackin tomorrow?

**JESSIE:**

About the superbowl? I dunno ...

**MICHAEL:**

Yeah Wassup, man? We gonna throw a party? Wassup?

**JESSIE:**

What girls you gonna have over there?

**MICHAEL:**

Man, all I'm saying, all I know is that there's gonna be a bunch of primas there.

**JESSIE:**

What about the, what about the party you took Mark too? Mark Ramirez.

**MICHAEL:**

What, Southgate?

**JESSIE:**

Yeah, Southgate.

**MICHAEL:**

That's his family, fool.

**JESSIE:**

Nah, you serious?

**MICHAEL:**

There's a bunch of hotness over there, dawg.

**JESSIE:**

Nah.

**MICHAEL:**

Hotness on the (Spanish)

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

---in terms of slang items when he asked him who is gonna be at the party, is there gonna be any hotness there.

**ROBERT:**

Hotness?

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Ah huh. Meaning are there gonna be any good looking girls there.

**JESSIE:**

I'm tired of talking to you though.

**MICHAEL:**

I'm tired of talking to you, fool! It's been awhile Though.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Also the pitch, the intonation, you'll hear some of the syllables drawn out, whaaat? What you mean fool? Like that, those sorts of things, that's also very characteristic of Chicano English.

**JESSIE:**

What about these fools? Think they're gonna grow up to be some real football or what?

**MICHAEL:**

Man that little short fool with cutoff sleeves, he's my cousin dawg. He might probably be something.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

----the use of foo, for fooo, for fool, as a term like man or guy, that's very common among kids that speak Chicano English of this age group. In fact, Occasionally when I was doing field work and I was interviewing kids who spoke Chicano English, they would actually call me fool. You know just kind of – slipping it in there the same way we might use man or, or guy.

**ROBERT:**

Or bro or ...

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Yeah.

**MICHAEL:**

Keisha, dawg

**JESSIE:**

Keisha

**MICHAEL:**

Yeah she's gonna...

**JESSIE:**

She's Mexican with a name like that?

**MICHAEL:**

Yeah, dawg.

**JESSIE:**

Does she speak Spanish too?

**MICHAEL:**

Nah, she don't even speak no Spanish.

**ROBERT:**

And they throw in the occasional word in Spanish or –

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Yes. And in fact what's interesting is that many people believe that Chicano English is a Spanish accent. Someone whose first language is Spanish and doesn't speak English – well yet. But in fact as we just heard, we heard JESSIE speaking and he doesn't in fact speak Spanish. Only enough to throw in a few words. And – those words actually tend to be – taboo or swear words.

**VOICE OF FOOTBALL PLAYER:**

Que?

**VOICE OF FOOTBALL PLAYER:**

Que?

**VOICE OF FOOTBALL PLAYER:**

No entiendo...

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

And it's still the classic pattern that the first generation born in the United States often will retain the home language, but by the second generation born here the home language is very often lost. So I don't think that Spanish is a threat to English in any way. I think if anything it's Spanish that is in danger and that we might want to look out for.

**VOICE OF FOOTBALL PLAYER:**

Adios

**NARRATOR:**

LIKE CARMEN, OTHER LINGUISTS BELIEVE SPANISH IS NO MORE A THREAT TO ENGLISH THAN GERMAN OR ITALIAN, WHICH ONCE PROVOKED SIMILAR FEARS.  
Radio Announcer:

Six minutes before the hour I am Shirley Strawberry right here on the STEVE Harvey morning show



**NARRATOR:**

MORNING DRIVE TIME IN L.A. EARLY IN 2003 HISPANIC AMERICANS PASSED AFRICAN AMERICANS TO BECOME THE BIGGEST MINORITY.

**STEVE HARVEY:**

We are a shake yo' booty radio station

**NARRATOR:**

BUT WITH YOUNG HISPANICS MOVING INTO ENGLISH, WILL SPANISH EVER HAVE THE IMPACT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENGLISH?

**STEVE HARVEY:**

You won't believe this but guess what...this is my man...

**NARRATOR:**

SPREAD THROUGH RAP, HIP-HOP, SOUL, R&B AND DJ'S LIKE STEVE HARVEY, THE BLACK ENGLISH INFLUENCE ON MAINSTREAM AMERICAN IS PROFOUND.

**ROBERT:**

Do you speak American?

**STEVE HARVEY:**

I speak good enough American. You know, I think there's variations of speaking American. I don't think there's any one set way, because America's so diverse. So I don't think that there's a certain way to speak American.

**STEVE HARVEY:**

You know man, upward America is not my audience. My audience is mostly grassroots people. And I sound mostly like they uncle, so. See like I said, I sound mostly like they uncle. And I was cool with that. That sound good to me.

**STEVE HARVEY:**

Isn't. You know isn't is not in my vocabulary. The word is ain't. Isn't requires my mouth to stretch in a way that it don't stretch, isn't. and then I leave it out there too long, I look really stupid when – he isn't telling the truth. I actually almost black out when I say that.

**ROBERT:**

But what do you say to those people, like some of the people in the school system in L.A. who say that African American kids need to learn standard English in order to get on in the world.

**STEVE HARVEY:**

Well you know, you do have to be bilingual in this country. And that means you can be very very adept at slang, but you have to be adept at getting through a job interview.

**NARRATOR:**

THE LA SCHOOL SYSTEM KNOWS ITS MINORITY STUDENTS WILL NEED TO BE, IN EFFECT, BILINGUAL. PS 100 IN WATTS IS ONE OF 60 SCHOOLS USING AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM CALLED ACADEMIC ENGLISH MASTERY.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

I need all groups to pay attention. Cloyd, I need your focus now. And Gerardo.

**NARRATOR:**

DANIEL RUSSELL USES A GAME OF JEOPARDY TO TEACH HIS GRADE FIVE CLASS HOW TO TRANSLATE THEIR “HOME LANGUAGE”, INTO MAINSTREAM AMERICAN.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

O.K. Here we go. My grandpa cook dinner every night.

**STUDENTS:**

Reference is singular Cooks My granpa cooks dinner every night

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Which feature is not mainstream American English?

**MAISO:**

Third person singular.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Yes. And Maiso. How do you code switch it into Mainstream American English?

**MAISO:**

My grandpa cooks dinner every night.

**STUDENT:**

They got it.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

You just got 500 more points.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

He funny. O.K. Ariel Barone. What's the answer?

**STUDENT:**

He is funny.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

He is funny. Excellent translation! Here we go. We don't have nothin' to do. O.K. Quiet please.

**STUDENT:**

We don't have nothinG to do.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Oh, I'm sorry. That is not accent translation into mainstream American English. So you're at minus four hundred. So let me roll and see which team will have an opportunity to get it. I might roll you guys again. One!

**STUDENTS:**

Anything, anything, anything

**STUDENT:**

We don't have anything to do.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Excellent translation!

**NOMA LEMOINE:**

I think perhaps the biggest misunderstanding is the idea that we are somehow teaching African American language --- teaching Ebonics if you will --- We don't need to teach African American language

**ROBERT:**

They don't need to teach it cause they come speaking

**NOMA LEMOINE:**

They already know it.

**ROBERT:**

Yeah, yeah

**NOMA LEMOINE:**

Our task is to help move them towards mastery of the language at school in its oral and written form, but to do that in a way where they are not devalued, or where they feel eh denigrated in any way by virtue of their cultural and linguistic differences.

**NOMA LEMOINE:**

Because when you begin to devalue youngsters, and make them feel that who they are doesn't count, then we've turned them off from education.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Last night we bake cookies.

**STUDENT:**

No, no it's past tense, past tense

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Are you ready? Number one. What language is it in?

**STUDENT:**

AAL

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

It is in African American Language. Number two. What linguistic feature is in AAL?

**STUDENT:**

Past tense marker –e.d.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Past tense marker –e.d. That's two. And how do you code switch it to main stream American English?

**STUDENT:**

Last night we baked cookies.

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

You got 500 more points.

**STUDENTS:**

Yes!

**DANIEL RUSSELL:**

Is it too easy, or I just taught you well this year?

**STUDENTS:**

[CHEERS] Too easy! NARRATION STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM SHOW SIGNIFICANT GAINS IN WRITTEN ENGLISH. THOSE BEHIND IT BELIEVE THAT UNLESS MORE TEACHERS TREAT HOME LANGUAGE AS SYMPATHETICALLY, THEY'LL CONDEMN MORE GENERATIONS TO SCHOOL FAILURE. LANGUAGE REMAINS A FORMIDABLE FRONTIER IN THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY.

**ROBERT:**

Three helicopters overhead and there's a police roadblock up here. In any other big city you'd think it was a crime scene or an act of terrorism or a bomb scare or something, but this is Los Angeles, the beginning of Beverly Hills here. And this is a big night for the movie industry, the Golden Globe Awards. And they're being presented in the Beverly Hilton Hotel right through there. TV Announcer:

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome last year's Best Actress winner, Nicole Kidman.

**NARRATOR:**

MOVIES, TV AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY HELP TO SPREAD NEW LANGUAGE. Nicole Kidman:

And the nominees for best actor: Adrian Brody, The Pianist...

**NARRATOR:**

AND BECAUSE THE STARS LIVE IN HOLLYWOOD AND HOLLYWOOD'S IN CALIFORNIA, CALIFORNIA ENGLISH GETS AN EXTRA BOOST.

**NARRATOR:**

THE NEXT MORNING I'M IN BEVERLY HILLS TO MEET THE MOVIE WRITER AND DIRECTOR, AMY HECKERLING. THOUGH SHE HERSELF COMES FROM THE BRONX, SHE PUTS A LOT OF CALIFORNIA SLANG INTO HER SCRIPTS. AMY EVEN COMPILED HER OWN DICTIONARY FOR HER MOST FAMOUS MOVIE AND THE TV SERIES THAT FOLLOWED IT – *CLUELESS*.

**ROBERT:**

We noticed looking over your shoulder a minute ago that you had um a page for expressions for good, something that's good, and some for bad, would you read us from each of those pages?

**AMY HECKERLING:**

...flava, butta, Coolio, smooth, er, super, money, nails, tits as in it's the tits. Feeion, like fine broken up into a bunch of syllables. Kicking juice keen funky monster proper rad noble wicked tubular trippy[...] stoked. Rules rocks, stellar, tasty, sweet.

**ROBERT:**

How about bad? Page for bad?

**AMY HECKERLING:**

This could go on for ever.

**ROBERT:**

Sure.

**AMY HECKERLING:**

Random, heinous, cheesy, um blows,bites, bogus, bunk, brick, bum, bum deal, bunk busted, bug, chicken shit, dreaded, drip[...] clueless, it sucks. The classic.

**AMY HECKERLING:**

And uh whenever young actors came in I would always say what do you say for good, for bad,

**NARRATOR:**

AMY'S MOVIE CLUELESS ACHIEVED ICONIC STATUS, AND INTRODUCED CALIFORNIA TEEN SLANG TO THE REST OF AMERICA. Alicia Silverstone:

Eew...get off of me! Uh, as if! Teenage Actor:

Nice stems. Alicia Silverstone:

Thanks. Teenage Actor:

Whatever. Alicia Silverstone:

Did I miss something? Is big hair back? Teenage Actor:

This is ragin' Alicia Silverstone:

Let's do a lap before we commit to a location. Teenage Actor:

Heello. Teenage Actor:

Survey says Teenage Actor:

I thought it reeked. Alicia Silverstone:

I thought that was your designer imposter perfume.

**NARRATOR:**

CLUELESS SATIRIZES CALIFORNIA MORES AND TEEN TALK. WINNIE HOLZMAN AIMED FOR NATURALISM IN THE CULT TV SERIES "MY SO CALLED LIFE", IN WHICH SHE CHRONICLED TEENAGE ANGST. SHE OFTEN WRITES IN THIS COFFEE SHOP. WINNIE Holzman:

---a lot of the waitresses would be around seventeen, eighteen, and I would hear them discussing certain things that I just would write right down... WINNIE Holzman:

I'd like a diet pepsi.

**ROBERT:**

I'll have an iced tea, please. Thank you.

**ROBERT:**

You said you were trying to put yourself inside the head of TEENAGERS, one of which you used to be --- WINNIE Holzman:

Well I think its just, you know, its like I said, it's a biological time, I mean biologically you're, everything in you is telling you to move on, to move away, to grow up and to leave behind the things of childhood.

**ROBERT:**

Tell us your thoughts about why they create their own language, TEENAGERS? WINNIE Holzman:

I think its perfectly natural at that point, you know, your peer group becomes incredibly important to you, your little tribe of friends becomes your new family, and you need to have – everything symbolises that, everything – the clothes you wear, the way you speak and I think people, I mean language is— there's no, there's almost nothing more personal than how you express yourself

**TEENAGER:**

Can I have a slice of cheese pizza and a small soda, please?

**NARRATOR:**

I'M CURIOUS TO FIND OUT HOW CALIFORNIA TEENAGE SLANG HAS MOVED ON SINCE THE EARLY 90'S WHEN *CLUELESS* AND *MY SO CALLED LIFE* WERE FIRST RELEASED. SO I'M IN IRVINE, SOUTH OF LA, TO MEET A BUNCH OF TEENS FROM THE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL, WHOM I CAN CALL, AS WE ALL SEEM TO THESE DAYS, "YOU GUYS."

**ROBERT:**

Do you guys still say so, not, whatever?

**TEENAGER:**

Yes

**TEENAGER:**

Yeah

**CATHERINE:**

Yeah clueless cause like now I'm like permanently like, like messed up because.

**TEENAGER:**

Damaged

**TEENAGER:**

Because like I say like, like and dude every other word because of that movie it's horrible

**ROBERT:**

You can't get it out, you can't get Clueless out of your system is that what

**TEENAGER:**

I saw it once

**ROBERT:**

Really

**TEENAGER:**

It became sort of like a cultural trend, so like a lot of kids started saying it and then people would do the, how do you do the whatevers...

**TEENAGER:**

Whatever moron get the picture you're a total loser.

**ROBERT:**

Hey could I ask you some expressions and ask you what they mean.

**ROBERT:**

Uh, tight.

**TEENAGER:**

Tiiight.

**ROBERT:**

How do you say it?

**TEENAGER:**

Tiiight.



**ROBERT:**

Is it about appearance?

**Catherine:**

Well if you got a new car and it's really nice, you say 'My new car is tight', you know?

**ROBERT:**

Uber.

**TEENAGER:**

You can be an uber-nerd, or, it's like, it's like super nerd. Or, uber-anything

**ROBERT:**

Fob.

**TEENAGER:**

Asians who came to America not too recently.

**TEENAGER:**

Like, when you speak and you still have an accent and like your English is still kind of fobby.  
(laughs)

**ROBERT:**

Fobby. Word

**TEENAGER:**

Like I Agree

**TEENAGER:**

Word

**ROBERT:**

How do you say it?

**TEENAGER:**

That test was so hard. Word.

**TEENAGER:**

Word

**ROBERT:**

Meaning?

**TEENAGER:**

I agree.

**ROBERT:**

Oh the other person says word

**TEENAGER:**

Yeah

**ROBERT:**

Oh. I see. That test was so hard.

**TEENAGER:**

Yeah

**ROBERT:**

Word

**ROBERT:**

What's up?

**TEENAGER:**

Whatsup girl?

**ROBERT:**

Yeah.

**CATHERINE:**

A lot of like those kinds of things come from like the rap and rap music. Cause you hear them say "oh my peeps, and y'all, yo."

**TEENAGER:**

Guys always like they're walking and they see another guy and they're like hey "'sup."

**CATHERINE:**

The middle seat in the back seat like it's the bitch seat, like you're sort of like the bitch like you know like you're my bitch you know sort of like that. --- But we use bitch like, dude, you're my bitch, like so-and-so's gonna be my bitch for like homecoming or whatever you know?

**TEENAGER:**

Like prison, you know?

**ROBERT:**

I made that test my bitch

**TEENAGER:**

You nailed that test, and like you aced it or yeah, you did really well on it.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

--- many people across the country are familiar with the California dialect from movies like Clueless. It includes some shifts in the sound system. So for example eh, one of the things I've studied is 'oo' fronting. Words that have 'oo' in them in California English are often pronounced very close to the front of the mouth. So the word 'do' might be pronounced more like 'do'. I do.

**ROBERT:**

Do.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Oh very good. That's it. I do. And also words with 'o'. Go, go.

**ROBERT:**

Go.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

I'm going to go. Yeah that, that, that's also common.

**ROBERT:**

Put those together in some sentences that sound like Californian.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

You're gonna go, oh my God. You like him, you really do? [laughs]. I'm totally surprised. I do too though. [laughs].

**ROBERT:**

And is that growing or is that just a passing thing that we recognised as Valley Girl or whatever it was called em, 20 years ago?

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Oh no. I can hear these features in radio announcers now. My age or older, on TV. It's definitely, the California dialect is here to stay. It's not just a passing fad.

**ROBERT:**

What are some of your favourite examples of that, of eh.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Of California things?

**ROBERT:**

Of California, yeah.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

I like 'I'm all'. I think that's a very good one to be all something as a quotative, introducing quoted speech. So I'm all, I don't think I'm gonna go and he's all I think you should. And I'm all why? And he's all cause it'll be fun. And I'm all I don't think so. Etcetera.

**ROBERT:**

It suddenly occurred to me, do men speak valley girl?

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Ah, that's such a good question and it's one I wanted to explore. Men speak surferdude.

**ROBERT:**

Surferdude.

**CARMEN FOUGHT:**

Yes.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

dude, that was gnarly ---that peak just jacked up so quick there was no way man, I got thrown with that lip, couldn't even get to my feet,

**NARRATOR:**

SURFER DUDES AND SURFING SLANG HAVE HAD A SEMINAL EFFECT ON CALIFORNIA SPEECH.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Dude I sunk my inside rail on that turn man. Man, that was lame.

**ROBERT:**

So much new language is generated by the California culture of being extremely energetic in the sun. Where better to start then Ventura county and Surfer's point, and the place where many surfers hang out, the Bad Ass Café?

**NARRATOR:**

IN THE 1960'S THE BEACH BOYS WERE THE FIRST TO PUT SURF SLANG INTO HIT SONGS LIKE "SURFIN' SAFARI".

**ROBERT:**

Hi.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Hi there.

**NARRATOR:**

I'VE COME TO THE BAD ASS CAFÉ TO MEET SOMEONE WHO LIVES TO SURF.

**ROBERT:**

You busy?

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Not too much today.

**ROBERT:**

The surf's too good?

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Surf's too good, for sure. For sure.

**NARRATOR:**

GEORGE PLOMARITY HAS QUALIFIED AS A PARALEGAL, BUT HE PREFERS TO WORK HERE AT THE BAD ASS.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

There's your mocha. That'll be three bucks please.

**ROBERT:**

Yes.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Thank you.

**NARRATOR:**

WHAT HE EARNS HERE PAYS FOR HIS PASSION. TO SURF.

**NARRATOR:**

WHEN HE FINISHES WORK, GEORGE AGREES TO TAKE ME FOR A RIDE IN HIS CLASSIC VOLKSWAGEN MINIBUS AND SHOW ME WORLD FAMOUS RINCON POINT

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

I've had this car about 7 months now.

**ROBERT:**

Oh really, you haven't had it since 1970.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

No. I haven't even been alive since 1970. I was only born in '75!

**ROBERT:**

Right. Oh, oh god. (laughs)

**NARRATOR:**

CALIFORNIA SPEECH SEEMS TO BE HAVING A GROWING INFLUENCE ON MAINSTREAM AMERICAN.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

When we get out to Rincon you'll see.. the point actually comes all the way into here before it ends. These little guys are surfing a spot called the wall. That's a fun little surf spot. That single fins getting killer, this is gonna be great.

**NARRATOR:**

I WANT TO KNOW IF SURF SLANG IS STILL SHAPING CALIFORNIA SPEECH.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Ah, there's a lot of people in the water. Look at that great wave, that guys still going on it! He's gonna set up for a little barrel on the inside.

**NARRATOR:**

TWENTY YEARS AGO FOR OUR TV SERIES *THE STORY OF ENGLISH*, WE FILMED A ROCK BAND CALLED THE SURF PUNKS.

**NARRATOR:**

I STARTED BY SHOWING GEORGE A CLIP FROM OUR OLD FILM

**ROBERT:**

I think it'll interest you.

**SURFER:**

So uh Mark what'd you do today?

**MARK:**

Well, like, you, know I got this new stick and I was like cranking on some radical tubes...

**SURFER:**

Oh yeah sure how big was it?

**MARK:**

It was like radically overhead...

**SURFER:**

...whatever.

**SURFER:**

So check it out dude like you know I was cruising the beach yesterday

**SURFER:**

Certain words find their way into the whole language and some it's pretty off the wall.

**SURFER:**

In surfing when the wave curls over, that's like the tube, or the pocket, so if you're in the tube, you're taking the highest risk and you're very rad.

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

[laughs]

**SURFER:**

I saw this chick and she had a totally tight bod and she was totally buff, and that, that means that she is in shape and she's clean, and she's looking good.

**SURFER:**

Well some guy wearing some rad outfit and just go wow, that's rad, that's pretty gnarly.

**SURFER:**

Cookin'.

**SURFER:**

Look at this, we all, the same watches, they're totally rad, right?

**SURFER:**

Way rad. Way rad.

**SURFER:**

Fully rad.

**ROBERT:**

So is that stuff still current?

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Yeah, --- I think it is, I think it is. those words are all used and definitely like find their way into vernacular speech, you know you can hear everyone describing things as rad, you know, or you know or people being like, like hot, or truly radical----a lot of those phrases that came out in the early 80's got, got co-opted, you know, they got taken over by like some corporate people that use them to, to shlog t-shirts, --- to the max, that's a wonderful example of something that was taken by Pepsi in the 80's you know, and just whored until its not used any more.

**ROBERT:**

What are some of the um, what are some of the new expressions?

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Uh, full on. Full on's a great example. Uh, off the wall, he uses that. That's another phrase you hear a lot, you know? Or Right on, or Fully, or like

**ROBERT:**

Fat?

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

That was phat, like a phat air,

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**



It's phat like with a ph.

**ROBERT:**

And phat air means going off the wave, in the air?

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

Exactly, exactly, and being really high GEORGE PLOMARITY :

Surfers themselves have just moved into the mainstream of the culture, and that's why their expressions are heading in that direction, you know, we have like a lot of people that are professionals, they, they'd go out and surf in the morning you know, get as crazy as they can and really push themselves to their limits, and then you know, take a shower and go to the law office, and they're going to carry over that language with them you know, and a great example of that would be like the phrase – caught inside. You know, you hear that all over the place, in describing any situation where you suddenly have to, to try and deal with, with a whole lot of stuff coming at you at the same moment.

**NARRATOR:**

IT SEEMS THAT SURF SLANG REMAINS AS VIGOROUS AND INVENTIVE AS EVER.  
LISTEN TO GEORGE DESCRIBE THE PERFECT "RIDE".

**GEORGE PLOMARITY:**

You know, waves break in sections, so you can talk about like – wow you know that first section was sick, you know, that drop was really heavy, it made that bottom turn come around, went through that mushy part and then it just jacked on that second bowl, got that floater, came into the inside and just cracked that lip as hard as I could, set up for that barrel and just – right on into the green room man - sick.

**NARRATOR:**

NEW LANGUAGE ALWAYS GROWS AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF LIFE. AND  
CALIFORNIA'S LIFESTYLE IS NOTHING IF NOT CUTTING EDGE.

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

We use a lot of terms that helps describe Skateboarding, goofy foot, regular foot, switch, going fakey.

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

Rippers, you know ripping are just, eh, adjectives to describe kids or skaters that are just ripping, tearing it up. Out there on the course and just having a good time and ripping.

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

When you get into a park and there's a lot of guys skating and, everyone's hyping each other on and everyone's trying to outdo each other, you know that's the time to just really go out and, and,

you know blast the biggest airs you can, and do the longest grinds you can. And just perform as best you can

**NARRATOR:**

STEVE BADILLIO'S SLANG IS SO FAR OUT FOR ME, THAT HE NEEDS TO TRANSLATE ALMOST EVERY OTHER WORD.

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

In Skateboarding ----One little false move, one little thing off and you're, you're slamming, you're taking, you're taking a fall. But I like blasting airs, for sure.

**ROBERT:**

And that's what you were doing over the doorway here?

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

Sure that was a front side air over the gap,

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

Coping is basically the steel pipe or plastic PVC that's on the tops of the lip of the ramps, we call it coping.

**ROBERT:**

That's what you grind on.

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

That's what you grind on, and eh do the tricks on is on the coping.

**STEVE BADILLIO:**

Street skating, vert skating, pool skating ---- And downhill bombing, which you know most skaters love just the basic natural form of just going down a hill and going as fast as you can and carving it up and eh, and having fun with it.

**NARRATOR:**

THERE'S A WHOLE NEW LEXICON FOR SNOWBOARDERS. STICKING IT CLEAN MEANS PULLING OFF A TRICK TO PERFECTION. IF YOU CAN REPEAT THE TRICK AGAIN AND AGAIN, YOU'VE GOT IT DIALED IN.

**JAYK GOFF:**

That's sick. That's the super- like super sick stuff.

**ROBERT:**

Sick?

**JAYK GOFF:**

Yeah, it's pretty much sick. Like, someone goes off and does something and stomps it clean than that's you're gonna like give him props and that's gonna be something sick. And that's what you're gonna like, it's gonna raise the level of riding and everybody's just gonna, like just get everybody amped up.

**NARRATOR:**

JAYK GOFF'S SNOWBOARD LINGO ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT FASCINATES ME ABOUT HIS SPEECH. YOUNG CALIFORNIANS (AND NOW MUCH OF THE WORLD) SAY LIKE WHERE WE ONCE SAID UM OR ER. AND THEY USE LIKE TO MEAN "QUOTE – UNQUOTE". JAYK USES "LIKE" THIRTEEN TIMES, IN BOTH SENSES, IN THE NEXT 74 WORDS.

**JAYK GOFF:**

Yeah like I like what I say like sometimes people just don't understand it like I, like my terminology for certain things which is like, like whom I clique, my group, like my friends, like nobody else understands it so if I go someplace else, or some place new they are like, they don't know it so like and they are like, they are like what are you talking about?

**ROBERT:**

Hi. I'm from Public Broadcasting. We're here to do some filming. Thank you.

**NARRATOR:**

WARS AND ARMIES HAVE ALWAYS ADDED WORDS TO OUR LANGUAGE, WORDS LIKE *SHOCK & AWE*, *COLLATERAL DAMAGE*, AND *WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION*. THE U.S. MILITARY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FORCING GROUND FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. THEY WERE AMONG THE FIRST NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO CONFRONT RACISM AND SEGREGATION. NOW THEY'RE ON THE FRONT LINE OF THE WAR ON SEXISM. THE MARINE CORPS DRILLS THIS INTO ITS NEW RECRUITS.

**SERGEANT SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN:**

There's a green zone, a yellow zone, and a red zone. The green zone would be just a normal interaction between male and female. The yellow zone would probably be the sort of comments where it could be taken as something that may be sexually orientated or may cause someone to feel uncomfortable. The red zone is considered just to be a blatant sexual remark. Like check him or her out, or look what they have there, or I want to get some of that.

**STAFF SERGEANT DENISE RUIZ:**

How has the language changed? As far as...

**ROBERT:**

The way, the way the men talk ...

◇**STAFF SERGEANT DENISE RUIZ:**

Like cursing and telling jokes?

**ROBERT:**

Yeah

**STAFF SERGEANT DENISE RUIZ:**

Like I said. It all depends on how you are. If you can tell a joke just as good as they can, laugh, tell yours too. If you're the type that you don't wanna hear jokes like that, you tell them that. And they should respect that. If you'd like it, ey by all means. If you don't, say something.

**NARRATOR:**

THE MILITARY REFLECTS WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SOCIETY AT LARGE. THE TRIUMPH OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS OR EUPHEMISM, PERHAPS, BUT IN LANGUAGE THESE DAYS AMERICANS SEEM RELUCTANT TO GIVE OFFENSE TO ANYONE.

**ROBERT:**

What is the Marine Corps policy on gays in the Marines Staff Sergeant Andy S. Beavers:

Marine Corps policy on homosexuals in the military is that we don't ask, and they don't offer that information up. Basically the don't ask, don't tell policy.

**ROBERT:**

And is that working? Staff Sergeant Andy S. Beavers:

I think it is, sir.

**TOM AMMIANO:**

Alright! Happy Gay Day!

**NARRATOR:**

GAY PRIDE DAY IN SAN FRANCISCO. TOM AMMIANO, A GAY COMEDIAN IN THE 1980'S, RAN FOR MAYOR IN 2003. TODAY MANY OF THE WORDS TOM USES TO DESCRIBE THE MARCH – QUEEN, QUEER, FAG, DYKE -- WOULD ONCE HAVE BEEN SEEN AS OFFENSIVE, HOMOPHOBIC. BUT TODAY THESE WOMEN DELIGHT IN CALLING THEMSELVES “DYKES ON BIKES”. Tom Amiano:

Dyke and bikes is always a thrill. Dykes on bikes which Always traditionally starts off the parade because we're now accumulating a history --- you'll see the S & M community and the leather community, the cross-dressing drag queen community, gay cops always have a big contingence in that group gay clergy. You'll even see yes my friends, gay republicans. I used to so joke about them about their cheer being we're here, we're queer, we're sorry.

**NARRATOR:**

THE WORD “QUEER” WAS ONCE A HOT TOPIC FOR THE COMMITTEE THAT ORGANISES THE GAY PRIDE MARCH. Calvin Gibson:

I think the pride committee got very radical in 1993 when the theme for the parade was the year of the queer. Um that forced us that placed it on a national platform the word queer.

**ROBERT:**

Calvin is it analogous to some blacks calling themselves nigger nowadays, but being very offended if ... if some ... if a white person [...] [...]? Calvin Gibson That's ... that's exactly ... that's exactly what it is, um ...

**ROBERT:**

And how do you describe ..... that movement of the word, what ... why has it evolved like that? Calvin Gibson:

I ... I believe its because people feel um disempowered and this is one way to empower themselves. If we can use the word queer so many times that it just becomes a normal word in our language without any consequence, then I think we see ourselves as being more empowered ----so its sort of proves the point that you can change the meaning of words.

**TOM AMMIANO:**

We're here, we're proud, were not hiding and we want to take away any of the prejudices and want to say to you I'm not going to hide it so you can continue to persecute us.

**NARRATOR:**

THE ABILITY TO SPEAK AND UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE ALMOST DEFINES WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN. BUT SOME HUMAN ABILITIES ARE INCREASINGLY BEING MATCHED, OR SURPASSED, BY COMPUTERS. TODAY, IN FACT, THE CUTTING EDGE OF RESEARCH IN SILICON VALLEY INVOLVES TEACHING COMPUTERS TO SPEAK TO US AND UNDERSTAND US, AND THUS BE EASIER TO USE. THAT RESEARCH RAISES FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS ABOUT AMERICAN SPEECH AND ABOUT LANGUAGE ITSELF. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ALL THIS, I'VE COME TO MEET CLIFF NASS, A PROFESSOR HERE AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Humans are what we call voice activated. The minute the brain hears something that sounds even remotely like human speech – we bring to bear all the rules and expectations that we do when dealing with other people. So we listen for the same cues, what's the gender of the voice, what's the emotion, what's the personality? How should I speak back, what are my expectations and understanding? And we basically can't help it.

**ROBERT:**

And so what sort of things do they do?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Well, they respond with politeness and a whole range of other responses.

**ROBERT:**

So it isn't such a bad joke that Canadians say thank you to their automatic teller machine is it?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

No in fact it's highly natural. And it's probably much harder to avoid saying it than to say it.

**NARRATOR:**

VOICE-ACTIVATED TECHNOLOGY HAS ENORMOUS COMMERCIAL POSSIBILITIES. THE GERMAN AUTO MAKER, BMW, HIRED CLIFF NASS TO RESEARCH THE RIGHT VOICE FOR ITS LATEST LUXURY SEDAN.

**NARRATOR:**

A BMW SALESMAN LET ME TEST DRIVE THE VEHICLE – AND THE VOICE CLIFF CHOSE FOR IT.

**COMPUTER:**

Navigation menu. You have selected the following entry.

**ROBERT:**

It talks to you. I mean, telephone.

**COMPUTER:**

Pardon me?

**ROBERT:**

Telephone

**COMPUTER:**

Telephone Menu

**ROBERT:**

You see, then it keeps asking you. (Beep) Oh. It didn't like what I said. So it turned it off.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

So one of the things, the first consideration in choosing a voice is should it be male or female. In fact in the original German version of the interface, they chose a female voice. And German

reactors, reacted very negatively saying that I don't wanna be told how to drive by a woman. And in fact they actually had a product recall requiring them to in fact have a male voice instead.

**ROBERT:**

But what about American men? I mean, they're much more amenable to being told by women how to drive, aren't they?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Well I don't know that they'd wanna pay extra for it, though.

**COMPUTER:**

Do you wish to record another note?

**ROBERT:**

No.

**ROBERT:**

So just tell me --- what your input was in arriving at the voice that the BMW uses.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

We've generated about twenty-five models ---- everything from night rider to Hal the computer in 2001, to er the guy who's usually the main buck on the stage coach, a sort of wacky older guy who rode shotgun, to a best friend, to a golfing buddy, etc. And went through all those and said, which one would best fit the positioning of the BMW automobile. We then went through and listened to hundreds and thousands of voices to come up with those that sounded like a co-pilot. Male, slightly younger than the average age of the driver so they wouldn't feel threatened. A masculine voice but not overly masculine. Speaks relatively slowly so that it doesn't feel like he's trying to take control. And from that we then cast the voice, selected the voice.

**ROBERT:**

Have they developed um sort of personality, voice personalities for other cars?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Voice technology will appear in all cars. And then we're gonna start seeing a much broader range of voices. So for example we can imagine for a Volkswagen Beetle it would be a very present rich personality, almost certainly female, because of the nature of the curviness of the car and a great deal of enthusiasm and energy, and you know, not too flighty because after all it is a car.

**ROBERT:**

Are other products than cars going to have voices and personalities?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Well, there's going to be a spread of voice technologies from the high end to lower end things, more and more products having those technologies. And then there are gonna be the issues of how do we integrate them all, or do we want a cacophony of voices in our home screaming for attention at various times?

**ROBERT:**

Oh my God, you get home after a hard day and fifteen things in the house that are talking to you.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

It's not clear that people are gonna want to have long conversations with their toasters or refrigerators ---- you have to design around that problem.

**NARRATOR:**

THE WAY WE REACT TO VOICES BECOMES MUCH MORE COMPLICATED, WHEN WE CAN ALSO SEE WHO'S TALKING.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Ok. This is Baldy.--- And what's special about Baldy is – he is able to say anything you want him to say, with extremely good lip movement that matches what he says.

**ROBERT:**

Get – get him to say something.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Ok what would you like him to say?

**ROBERT:**

Um.. how about... my name is Baldy, welcome to the Stanford Lab.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

I'm going to type that in. And then we'll just have Baldy repeat it.

**BALDY:**

My name is Baldy. Welcome to the Standford Lab.

**ROBERT:**

What about a – a real human – with a – synthesised voice?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Well we can show you what that looks like.



**BALDY:**

Windfall is the story of an ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances. Ben Linedburg is a financially challenged English professor – with wife and two kids ...

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

That mismatch leaves people to think that he's less intelligent. They trust the synthetic voice less, and trust his face less, than if he spoke like quote a real person.

**NARRATOR:**

IN EXPERIMENT AFTER EXPERIMENT, CLIFF NASS HAS FOUND THAT THIS KIND OF MISMATCHING CREATES MISTRUST. BALDY IS NOT TRUSTED WHEN HE SPEAKS WITH A REAL HUMAN VOICE BALDY IS MORE TRUSTED, AND MORE LIKED, WHEN HE SPEAKS WITH HIS SYNTHETIC VOICE, BECAUSE HE HIMSELF IS SYNTHETIC. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH BECOME REALLY SERIOUS WHEN MISMATCHING IS APPLIED TO RACE AND GENDER.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Here we see a picture of you.

**ROBERT:**

Do I speak American.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Here we're using a technology called veeppers. And what we were able is just take a still photograph of you – you'll see that the face moves and blinks, that's all being generated by the computer. But most powerfully we can make you speak in different – voices. Test animation:

If I spoke like this would you hire me for a job requiring contact with the public?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

So we know immediately – that that's a male, an – older male speaking. A strong deep voice, suggesting credibility, and it fits very well with the face we see. Now we can ask the question – what would happen if – that same face, spoke with a voice that didn't ---- match. And here's what that sounds like Test animation:

If I spoke like this would you hire me for a job requiring contact with the public?

**ROBERT:**

That's funny. I mean it's – it makes me sound – like a white southerner.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Exactly but interestingly that voice is not from a white southerner. That voice is – the voice of John Baugh – who you spoke with earlier – and here's John Baugh – saying the same – sentence. Test animation:

If I spoke like this would you hire me for a job requiring contact with the public?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

even though those two voices were literally identical – people listening – perceive them differently..

**ROBERT:**

And we know he doesn't speak like that normally, he puts these accents on for his own research purposes. Do you have him speaking with his own voice?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Yeah here is something we heard him say earlier.

**JOHN BAUGH:**

Hello. I'm calling about the apartment you have advertised in the paper.

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

That mismatch can lead to mistrust – perceived lack of intelligence, unwillingness to purchase etc.

**ROBERT:**

You mean – somebody seeing a black – African American – speaking – without an accent they consider appropriate, they mistrust?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Exactly, and that wouldn't just apply to African Americans, that would apply to any ethnicities. People when they see a face – they bring to bear stereotypes of how that person should – behave, think and speak. When those stereotypes run counter – people say there's something wrong here. And that mistrust has consequences.

**ROBERT:**

As we've seen – all across the country there are – there are stereotypes – of the way people perceive um.. some racially – associated accents, regional accents and so on. Is this technology – just going to reinforce – um.. those stereotypes?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

whatever stereotypes people bring to bear when hearing a human speaking in a certain way, they bring those exact same stereotypes to bear when dealing with computers. --- If – the computer has a female voice, it will be perceived as doing – stereotypically better in areas that it – or

typically associated with women for example, discussions of love and relationships. It will be perceived as being a worse teacher of technical subjects, like physics.

**ROBERT:**

So what will determine whether this use of computers and synthesized voices reinforce those stereotypical perceptions or is there the potential for – erasing them and –?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

It's a great question, it has the potential for both. So for example, let's say we know. This regional accent is stereotyped as being unintelligent, let's make sure we never use it in any application that would imply a need for intelligence – then those stereotypes would be strongly reinforced. But let's say if we do the opposite, That would then, because of the way our brains are voice activated, would lead us to weaken that stereotype and potentially eliminate it.

**ROBERT:**

Going back to the comedian who does the brain surgery Jokes.

**ROBERT:**

With a southern accent – in other words have all brain surgery instruction done with a southern accent?

**PROFESSOR CLIFF NASS:**

Exactly, that would tend to lead us over a time to believe that in fact – brain surgeons can be or should be southern.

**ROBERT:**

9-0-3-6

**COMPUTER:**

9-0-3-6. And next?

**ROBERT:**

Dial Answering Machine:

Hi. You've reached Allison and David Please leave us a message and we'll get right back to you.

**ROBERT:**

Hi sweetie. It's daddy. I'm driving along the coast of California on a beautiful sunny day and I wondered how things are in Cambridge, Mass. Anyway, talk to you soon. Love. Bye for now.

**ROBERT:**

Navigation System.

**COMPUTER:**

Navigation menu.

**ROBERT:**

Navigation address book.

**COMPUTER:**

Navigation Menu.

**ROBERT:**

Address book.

**COMPUTER:**

Pardon me? You have selected the following entry. Help takes you at any time to this general help. With options the possible command options are read out to you.

**ROBERT:**

Help.

**COMPUTER:**

Yes or no?

**ROBERT:**

Yes. Help. Help.

**NARRATOR:**

EVERYTHING IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE—EACH NEW FRONTIER ENCOUNTERED, GEOGRAPHICAL, SPIRITUAL, TECHNICAL— HAS ALTERED OUR LANGUAGE. WHAT KIND OF A FRONTIER ARE WE CROSSING BY TEACHING COMPUTERS OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN SKILL—TO SPEAK? THAT QUESTION LEAVES US ONE LAST STOP ON OUR JOURNEY. FROM SAN FRANCISCO I FOLLOW THE COAST NORTH TO THE CITY OF SEATTLE. AN EARLY START THIS MORNING TO MEET SOMEONE WHO'S AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF VOICE ACTIVATED COMPUTERS. BUT HIS JOB AT MICROSOFT KEEPS HIM SO BUSY THAT THE ONLY CHANCE WE HAD TO TALK WAS ON HIS DRIVE TO WORK. XD HUANG IS AN IMMIGRANT FROM CHINA. AND HE'S THE MAN WHO'S TEACHING OUR COMPUTERS TO TALK TO US.

**XD HUANG:**

We want to bring this benefit to the computer. So people can easily get information from computers.

**ROBERT:**

Is technology tending to homogenize language?

**XD HUANG:**

If you have a strong accent, computer will probably just ask you “What? I’m sorry, what did you say?” If you’ve actually entangled with today’s computer system, probably you have heard that many times. I’ll just park here. Is that ok?

**NARRATOR:**

MICROSOFT AIMS TO DEVELOP COMPUTER PROGRAMS THAT WILL RECOGNIZE ANY AMERICAN DIALECT. RIGHT NOW, HOWEVER, BUSINESS LOGIC SUGGESTS AN INITIAL INVESTMENT IN SPEECH THAT IS EASIEST FOR COMPUTERS TO UNDERSTAND.

**ROBERT:**

I think you told us earlier that if they sounded like CNN they would be recognised by the computer?

**XD HUANG:**

If you use standard American-English probably you will get the work done easier, faster,

**NARRATOR:**

SO, IF XD HUANG IS RIGHT, VOICE ACTIVATED COMPUTERS COULD CREATE AN ENORMOUS DRIVE TOWARDS A STANDARDIZED AMERICAN ENGLISH. PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS TELLING ME THAT TELEVISION HAS THIS EFFECT. BUT ON THIS JOURNEY WE’VE SEEN THAT IN MANY WAYS AMERICANS ARE TALKING LESS ALIKE, NOT MORE. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT RADIO, TELEVISION AND MOVIES HELP US UNDERSTAND OTHER WAYS OF SPEAKING, BUT THEY DON’T MAKE US SPEAK THAT WAY. PERHAPS COMPUTERS WILL. AND IF THEY DO, WE’LL ALL END UP SOUNDING MUCH MORE LIKE ONE ANOTHER – OR RATHER, SOUNDING MUCH MORE LIKE OUR COMPUTERS.

**UNITED AIRLINES PHONE VOICE:**

Welcome to United Airlines Flight Information line. Please enter or say the United Flight number.

**ROBERT:**

United 24.

**UNITED AIRLINES PHONE VOICE:**

United Flight 24 is scheduled to depart on time at 9 AM from Seattle, Washington.

**ROBERT:**

Hello?

**NARRATOR:**

WILL WE ALL END UP SOUNDING LIKE THAT? PERSONALLY, I DON'T THINK SO. WE JUST AREN'T PROGRAMMED THAT WAY. OUR RICH DIVERSITY, THE STRONG PULL OF LOCAL IDENTITY, THE JOYS OF NEW JARGON AND SLANG, ARE ALL TOO MUCH PART OF WHO WE ARE -- AS AMERICANS --- AND AS HUMAN BEINGS. WELL...I'VE REACHED THE END OF THE ROAD. WE BEGAN OUR JOURNEY ON THE FERRY BOAT FROM NOVA SCOTIA. WE END HEADING OUT FROM SEATTLE. HEADING NOT INTO THE SUNSET OF OUR LANGUAGE, AS SOME FEAR, BUT A CONTINUOUS NEW DAWN.

**ROBERT:**

As it comes to an end, what an experience this has been, this journey through the American language, and the people who speak it in all their variety and vitality, informality and creativity. How to sum all that up? Certainly no better than Walt Whitman did, more than a century ago when he wrote, "Our language is not an abstract construction of dictionary makers, but has its basis broad and low – close to the ground." Truer than ever. And like: how cool is that?

THE END