FUTURE ENGLISH

Congratulations! You've just graduated with a Harvard degree, and, thanks to the expertise you've gained through your course on the History of the English Language, you have not one but ***three*** job offers as a language consultant. Three writers are working on projects in which they need to craft a version of the English language that will be spoken in the future, and they're looking for an expert who can provide a plausible vision for how English will continue to evolve. But since your language consulting skills are in extremely high demand, you've got time for only one proposal, so you must choose **ONE** of the following scenarios.

SCENARIO ONE: Novel
A novelist is writing a book set in the equivalent of Chicago in a dystopian United States, circa 3000 AD. The coastal cities (Manhattan, Boston, L.A., Seattle), long submerged in the ocean, are thriving—they're luxurious, exclusive, and extremely expensive. The now-underwater cities' once-incessant bustling has turned into a nearly silent bubbling, as its citizens communicate almost exclusively through text and blogging; they relegate less important messages to flotillas of emoji, who operate on their own networks. Chicago, however, is different. It's gritty and post-apocalyptic: gangs and turf wars prevail. Its land-bound citizens have always continued to speak English aloud regularly, and the language has thus continued to evolve over the past thousand years. The city never had the privilege of being sunk underwater and has therefore been subjected to increasing extremes of weather. After several generations had become gradually acclimatized to polar vortices, an arid heat wave turned Lake Michigan into a desert. Now, the weather has stabilized into a general tundra: neither Siberia nor the Sahara, the desolate wasteland of Future Chicago exists in a state of perpetual gray, though in seemingly infinite slight variations. Scuba Manhattan and Scuba L.A. have siphoned the country's resources to fuel their lavish marine economies, and Chicago's citizens have to scrape together existences from washed-up dregs. The protagonist is trying to quash a developer who's proposing to artificially submerge Chicago so it can become an underwater city.

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SCENARIO TWO: Movie
A screenwriter has set her latest film in Asia circa 3700 AD. English has become the lingua franca, but not without borrowing many elements from other languages. Centuries of monsoons that plagued the bulk of the continent during the middle of the third millennium have turned the Indian Subcontinent and much of southern China into lush tropical terrain; Oceania is a spectacularly diverse jungle. Eager biologists have predicted that the fifth millennium (that is, starting in the year 4000) will hail another Cambrian explosion. Cities are self-sustaining biospheres: buildings are designed along the lines of rainforest canopies or coral reefs, organically fused systems that produce their own thriving ecosystems. If the end of the second millennium (i.e., the 1800s and 1900s) was an Industrial Revolution, the fourth millennium has proven to be an Environmental Restitution. Technology is almost entirely self-sustainable. Even though the vast majority of the tropical jungle is now generated by machine, this is no animatronic Epcot Ecology: the seamless integration of organic technology, which we would translate in our English as "OrgoTech," renders it essentially impossible to tell the genesis of nearly anything. Our hero is on a mission to find the last monkey reportedly in existence whose genes have remarkably not undergone OrgoTech manipulation at some point in his ancestry.

The untrammeled monkey holds the key to cracking a certain mysterious disease that has been circulating: not only is the disease attacking humans and animals, it's seeping into the biology of our houses, and buildings can catch this illness.

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SCENARIO THREE: video game
A video game writer has designed a world circa 2600 AD in which everything, including language, has been fitted to accommodate technology. Robots and humans have successfully interbred; their offspring, like mules, are sterile, but these hybrids live for over five hundred years. (These hybrids are typically described in what translates in our English as "having a chip on one's shoulder"; any metaphoric meaning that this phrase ever had has been completely overtaken by the literal significance.) English is the dominant language in this world, but it is an English whose development has become ever-increasingly intertwined with machine life. The video game's primary plotline revolves around a cat-and-mouse, spy vs. spy game between two double agents, but beyond this complicated central plot, players can wander into countless side acts, so the writer needs to have a robust command of her world's future English in all aspects of life, from top-secret state interactions to elaborate rituals involving cats.

YOUR MISSION:
Provide a detailed **analysis** and **explanation** of the changes that your English of the future will undergo. What will it look and sound like? Remember that whatever changes the language undergoes, there must be a **coherent and cohesive system**. You must also provide **parallels** (or points of direct contrast) to the history of the development of English.

****NOTE:** You do **NOT** have to account for every detail in the scenario, and you should feel free to take liberties! The writer is looking for a future English that could have evolved, given her project's view of the future, but she also bows to your linguistic expertise, and she leaves the sound, look, function, and history of the language essentially in your hands.

END PRODUCT:

1) Sample passage: Both a **written** version and an **audio** version of **dialogue** that shows the language in action (roughly 20-30 lines).

2) A **description** of the unique **features** of this future version of English (roughly 300-400 words). You have to show change in **at least three** of the following areas—phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, orthography. But you can emphasize and elaborate more profoundly on one or two, if you want to provide more depth (e.g., explaining the full history of the re-instantiation of a singular "you"). **Use terms that we have developed over the course of the semester**.

> ** Make sure you take into account observable features of World English in the past and present as you develop the English of the future. Consider **parallels** in the history of the English language and/or parallels going on in contemporary dialects: think, for example, about pidgin languages, Spanglish, Tok Pisin, Jamaican English, etc. Remember, your language must be **cohesive** as a system.**

Some areas of consideration when you're exploring the structure of future English:

- **Phonology**. Sound changes operate across a class of phonemes: every sound in a similar environment has to change (e.g., the final [t] drops off, but not [t] elsewhere). What kinds of sound change would take place? Will some phonemes like [θ] and [ð] merge with others? Where might assimilation or dissimilation occur? Consider effects of elision, intrusion, and metathesis, etc. Will there be an equivalent to the Great Vowel Shift? Will there be effects due to ease of articulation or hypercorrection?
- **Morphology**. How will the forms of words change? Will the language employ affixes? Think about irregular forms; for example, will the language reduce or expand the number of irregular verbs? Will the pronouns change: re-introduction of a singular 'you,' elimination of oblique cases ('he' instead of 'him'), etc.? Will nouns continue to have plurals? What about verb tenses?
- **Syntax**. Will you keep the standard SVO word order? Will English borrow features from other languages, e.g., lack of inflections in Chinese?
- **Lexicon**. How will the vocabulary change? For example, consider new blends, clipped forms of words, words that are used in one sense now that will change in a significant way, or words that sound old-fashioned now but will become more prominent (e.g., today's "dog" and "girl" were unusual at first then normalized later).
- Less important to the structural change but still interesting to consider is **orthography**: What changes will occur in the rules for the written language?

A few additional resources to help you begin:

There are many fantasy and science fiction novels and movies set in the future that involve language change, which you might wish to consult for inspiration. For example: Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*; George Orwell, *1984*; H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*; *Blade Runner*, dir. Ridley Scott. You might also look at novels set in the past but which address questions of historical language change, such as T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*.

David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Crystal's overview on "The Future of English" (p. 112) provides a brief survey of some of the major questions and predictions about the language's future that have arisen over time.

David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*. There are two future visions of English presented. The first is a sort of technological corporate-speak in a Korean state. The second, and more radical in terms of its transformation from today's language, is a post-apocalyptic pidgin, which you can read more about at:
Slate (http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2012/10/25/the_cloud_atlas_phrasebook_your_guide_to_yibberin_the_true_true_language.html)
Live Science (http://www.livescience.com/24171-cloud-atlas-sheds-light-on-english-s-possible-future.html).

Nicholas Ostler, *The Last Lingua Franca: English Until the Return of Babel*. Ostler looks at the spread of lingua-francas over history, examining how trade routes and religion allowed languages like Phonecian and Persian to dominate. He predicts that English will be the last lingua-franca, since technology and increased facility of translation tools will render obsolete the need for a single language.