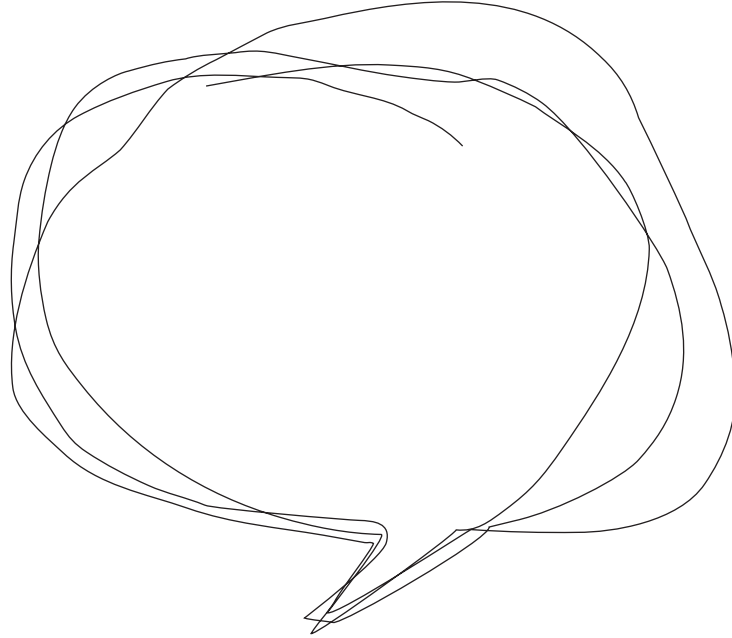


# TONGUES





# ***Tongues***

**ON LONGING AND BELONGING  
THROUGH LANGUAGE**

edited by Leonarda Carranza,  
Eufemia Fantetti, and Ayelet Tsabari

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# INTRODUCTION

*TONGUES IS A* book we dreamt up together, both separately and collectively. At some point or another, two of us walked down a wintry Toronto street speaking of a book just like this one. At another point, maybe in the spring, one of us called another to discuss how this idea could become reality. As immigrants and daughters of immigrants, as racialized women, as writers who lost their mother tongues or their ancestral languages, as English-as-a-second-language learners, we shared a curiosity and passion about language.

We had the unique opportunity to work on this collection of essays during a pandemic. As the world went into isolation, cities locked down, and people were told to stay apart, we had the honour of inviting twenty-three distinct voices who shared our fascination for and love of language to join this conversation. Essays arrived throughout the summer and into the fall—and as our lives shrunk and a restricted world became the new normal, the collection grew in breadth and scope. The essays bridged the distance, anchored and moved us, and eased our loneliness, much like language itself can do. We were reminded of Kai Cheng Thom’s essay where she

defines language as “the fluid within the collective body: like plasma, like blood, like spinal fluid, it carries nutrients and information from one unit to the next.”

Personal, lyrical, and candid, the essays in this collection investigate the intimate relationship between identity and language, confront the pain of losing a mother tongue or an ancestral language, and celebrate the joys and empowerment that come with reclamation. “I use Ojibwe in my work as a way to reclaim my culture, for just as Cedar is rooted in the earth, so my culture is rooted in the language,” writes Ashley Hynd in her essay, “The Seven Grandfathers and Translation.” Others admit to purposely unlearning their mother tongue as an act of survival. As Kamal al Solayle writes in “Tongue-Tied,” forgetting Arabic was “part of a journey of self-reinvention.”

We envisioned an anthology that would celebrate the richness and aliveness of Canada’s language diversity. There are more than seventy Indigenous languages and over two hundred mother tongues spoken in Canada. Some 7.4 million Canadians speak French, and 5.8 million Canadians speak at least two languages at home. Yet the irony of this project was not lost on us. Here we were editing an anthology about language written in one language and one language only, “the winner’s English,” Melissa Bull calls it in her essay, “English Baby.”

The legacy of colonialism is not ignored in these pages, as writers hold English and its colonial violence to account. The contributors to this anthology challenge us to think about the intricate relationship between English and privilege, and how power affects language learning, specifically the experience of learning English in Canada—a predominantly white, settler, colonial nation—and the shame and exclusion that often come with second-language learning. They demand that we think deeply about the languages we acquire, the languages we lose, the ones that are taken from us, and the ones we fight and struggle to reclaim. These essays are transformative. They confront us with the exclusionary, daily vio-



lence of racist, ableist, and cis-normative language. In “It’s Just a Figure of Speech,” Amanda Leduc asks us to consider our complicity with ableist language and how it “reinforces the idea that there is only one way to be in the world.” In “Gender Fluent,” Logan Broecker reflects on how gendered language affects the way we see ourselves and our place in the world, and in “What Are You? A Field Study,” Rowan McCandless magnifies the way that white supremacy and othering appear in everyday talk.

While the scope of this project was such that it didn’t allow for translated works to be included, we hope the many languages that make an appearance throughout the various texts pay tribute to the multilingual Canada we know. We hope they inspire readers to think deeper about the act of italicizing (a choice of marking “foreign” language in texts, which Rebecca Fisseha examines at length in her essay, “Say Something in Your Language”) and its relationship to othering. As for when to italicize, we allowed the writers to make their own choices on the matter.

Welcome to a series of profound, compelling personal narratives that explore the interrelationship between language, power, and privilege. As editors and writers, we invite you to join in and share our curiosity about the multiple ways that language lives and breathes inside each of us.

*Leonarda Carranza*

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*Ayelet Tsabari*