

The Prodigal Tongue takes a look at the wild, wacky and sometimes baffling road our language—English and others—is taking in its evolution. Where in the world will it end up?! Mark Abley, author of Spoken Here, has created an entertaining and informative exploration of the way that languages—English, Japanese, French, Arabic and other major tongues—are likely to transform and be transformed by their speakers during the twenty-first century. Grammar and vocabulary are just the beginning; more importantly, this book is about people. In places like Los Angeles, Tokyo, Singapore and Oxford, Abley encounters hip-hop performers and dictionary makers, bloggers and translators, novelists and therapists. He talks to a married couple who were passionately corresponding online before they met in “meatspace.” And he listens to teenagers, puzzling out the words they coin in chatrooms and virtual worlds. Everywhere he goes, he asks what the future is likely to hold for the ways we communicate. Abley balances a traditional concern for honesty and accuracy in language with an untraditional delight in newly minted expressions. Lively, evocative, passionate and playful, this is a book for everyone who cherishes the words we use.

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