

The charm of language



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Essay: The charm of language Mary Louise Pratt, a prominent scholar in linguistics and trans-culture study, starts her article *Art of the Contact Zone*, with a vivid description of her daily experience, of her son gaining the phonics, arithmetic skills, geography and history, even personal ethos and views toward the world through the media of his beloved baseball cards.

Then, diverting herself from this concrete example of literacy to a less common historical event of the discovery and acceptance of the grand work *The First New Chronicle and Good Government* by and indigenous Andean, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, she introduces a term called “contact zones”, which means the “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in context of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (P519) To further explain this new term, unfamiliar to most common readers, she returns to Guaman Pomas manuscript and proposes the concept of “autoethnography” for illustrations. According to Pratt, autoethnographic text refers to “a text which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (P519). The intended audience of such texts includes both the “metropolitan audiences and the speakers own community” (P520). Characterized by a mixture of Quechua, the native language of Andean indigenous of Latin America, and ungrammatical but expressive Spanish in written text, Guaman Pomas letter is intended to present to King Philip III of Spain, in order to give a chronicled account of the Andes long history and their profound sufferings brought by the Spanish conquest.