

The migrants' rendezvous with Australian slang also gives rise to many comic situations. The linguistic miscommunication in *A Change of Skies*, though comic, is black comedy exposing a fracture in interracial relationships (Lokuge 214). Language, as mentioned earlier, is one of the most important factors in cross-racial relationships and integration into a culture, a theme reiterated in the novel. But Gooneratne has conveyed this message in not so unkind ways, but through gentle humour and spirit of comedy. She has expressed this idea in her article "Constructing the Characters of Women in *A Change of Skies*," with special reference to Navaranjini, "how she [Navaranjini] develops a voice of her own and sheds, her Sita and Savitri skins for the more spunky Draupadi of *The Mahabharata* (*Australian Women's Book Review* 14).

The author has tried to drive away apprehensions about Australia by asserting that it is a place that would not permit one to return home. It has portrayed the natives in bright colours, never trying to colour their vision with racial prejudices.

23.3.5 Australian English

Australian English is different from British and American English in that it has a bias towards invention, deception, profanity, humour and a classless society. At times, this can make it almost impossible to understand and quite offensive to speakers accustomed to formality. It reflects Australia's identity conflicts born out of its penal history. In addition, it perhaps reflects the strong desire of many 19th century Australians to adopt Aboriginal names and words, particularly in rural Australia, which may have influenced pronunciation and inspired the fondness for the diminutive. There are various explanations of why the diminutive is so common in Australia. One is that the diminutive seems more informal (like slang) and thus reflects the Australian love of egalitarianism. In the words of Nenagh Kemp, a linguistic psychologist from University of Tasmania: "Australians who use these diminutives might be trying to sound less pretentious, more casual and more friendly than they would by using the full words" (*ABC News* 21 July 2010).

According to B. M. Horvath, author of *Variation in Australian English: The Sociolects of Sydney* (1985), "No other class of society would use slang more readily or adapt it more expertly to their new environment; no other class would have a better flair for concocting new terms to fit in with their new conditions in life" (186). One of the ways the convicts used to conceal their true meaning was to turn the meaning of a word upside down. For example, "bastard" or "ratbag" were used as terms of endearment as well as insults. The only way to know up from down was to infer from the tone of the sentence and the context it was used in. The Australian accent has been described as sounding excessively lazy. On the positive side, this has made it extremely easy for Australians to adopt other English accents but difficult for speakers of other English dialects to adopt the Australian accent.

In the novel, the author has given her native heroine, an eloquence in Australian slang thereby bringing out the ironical implications. Complaining about Australians' habit of shortening long names, Mr. Koyako's name for example – 'almost a short story' (*A Change of Skies* 97) – as a proof of their laziness is because when written they take up all the available space on paper or "air-space" on radio/TV. Hence, in course of time, Bharat became Barry and Navaranjini is shortened to Jean. It is because of this, the Australians fail to remember people by their names but by their professions as is evidenced by repeated reference to Bharat as "Dr. What's-his-name" (*A Change*

of *Skies* 98, 99,100). As a linguist, Barry too finds fault with the pronunciation habits of Australians: “the average Australian is lazy in his speaking habits, and finds our long names almost impossible to pronounce” (*A Change of Skies* 96).

23.3.6 Motifs in the Novel

The novelist has followed the techniques and jargon of deconstruction and postmodernism. Journey and voyage motifs exist along with field notes. The narrators are writers – writing becoming a springboard for narration – Edward wrote a diary; Bharat, a Guide; Navaranjini, a book on cuisine; Edwina, her field notes.

23.4 LET US SUM UP

Through a vivid montage of journals, extracts, dramatic monologues, letters and anecdotes, Yasmine Gooneratne has created a richly comic, incisive, and ultimately challenging picture of Australia that is full of deceptively simple, innocent ironies, exploring at the same time the paradox of a changing world scene and the stories of those who ‘let go’. Despite its effervescent comedy and a hilarious description of human existence, the novel turns out to be a serious reflection on the deeper levels of change, identity and belonging in the end.

23.5 GLOSSARY

Acculturation – assimilation to a different culture, typically the dominant one.

Assimilationism – the practice or policy of assimilating or encouraging the assimilation of people from all ethnic groups and cultures of origin.

Diaspora – the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland.

Exile – indicates a compulsory isolation, and a nostalgic anchoring in the past. It has multiple meanings which cover a variety of relationships with the mother country, which may include alienation, forced exile, self-imposed exile and political exile.

Immigration – the action of coming to live permanently in a foreign land characterised by a change in location, a physical movement and a forward-looking attitude.

Migration – Movement of people from one place to another with the intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily in a new location.

23.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Australia as a hybrid nation with special reference to the novel *A Change of Skies*.
2. Comment on the concept of ‘Return’ with reference to the four major characters in the novel – Edward, Bharat, Navaranjini and Edwina.

3. Discuss the theme of adaptation, including the identity crises and transformations undergone by the four major characters in the course of their migrant encounter with Australia.

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