

Yiddish, Spanish, Hebrew, and English—at various points in Ilan Stavans's life, each of these has been his primary language. In this rich memoir, the linguistic chameleon outlines his remarkable cultural heritage from his birth in politically fragile Mexico, through his years as a student activist and young Zionist in Israel, to his present career as a noted and controversial academic and writer. Along the way, Stavans introduces readers to some of the remarkable members of his family—his brother, a musical wunderkind; his father, a Mexican soap opera star; his grandmother, who arrived in Mexico from Eastern Europe in 1929 and wrote her own autobiography. Masterfully weaving personal reminiscences with a provocative investigation into language acquisition and cultural code switching, *On Borrowed Words* is a compelling exploration of Stavans's search for his place in the world.

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